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THE HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF CASA
MAÑANA MUSICALS, 1958-1980

THESIS

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By

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The investigation is a historical survey tracing the development of Casa Mañana Musicals, Inc., Fort Worth, Texas, from its experimental beginning in 1958 as the first permanent musical arena theatre in the United States, through twenty-three subsequent seasons. The study includes a chapter on the origins of theatre and the influences behind its concept dating back to the 1936 Casa Mañana produced by Billy Rose. Subsequent chapters deal with the theatre's seasons and its struggle to gain acceptance. The theatre's more recent financial and labor problems are also considered. Major sources include such unpublished data as production and financial records of the theatre, contracts, correspondence, minutes of the board of directors, and interviews. Published sources include accounts in newspapers and periodicals.

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CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND AND INFLUENCES

Introduction

On July 5, 1958, Casa Mañana opened its doors following a day that had boded only bad luck. All that day it had rained furiously as fierce thunderstorms menaced the area. Casa Mañana's roof, a trend-setting geodesic dome made up of 575 shiny, diamond-shaped aluminum panels and designed by architect-philosopher Richard Buckminster Fuller, had sprung several leaks on the very eve of the opening, endangering the brand new, red plush seats. Miraculously that afternoon, however, before the first theatre-goers had begun to arrive, the downpours had ceased, the sun had broken through, and the sky had begun to clear, paving the way for the opening that evening of the first permanent musical arena theatre in the United States.¹

Billy Rose and the Frontier Fiesta

To anyone who has moved into the North Texas area "recently" (within the last twenty years) and to all those but the most avid students of Fort Worth history, July 5, 1958, was the official christening of Casa Mañana. To many

¹Casa Mañana Musicals, Inc., "Casa Mañana Fact Sheet," 1979 (mimeographed).

oldtimers and longtime residents of Fort Worth, however, the date was significant only as the re-birth of an old idea, an idea that had its inception twenty-two years before in the fruitful mind of Amon G. Carter, Sr., flamboyant owner-publisher of the Fort Worth Star-Telegram. Always on the lookout for a gimmick to promote his city nationally, and more than marginally fanatical in his intense dislike of Dallas, the irascible Carter in early 1936 was searching for a way to get revenge for the fact that Dallas, not Fort Worth, had been chosen to present the "official" exhibition of Texas' centennial celebration.² In his book Amon, Star-Telegram writer Jerry Flemmons claims that Casa Mañana might never have come into being had it not been for Carter's insistence that Dallas was an illogical choice to host the celebration since it had not even been in existence a century before. Like others, he felt that a city directly connected with Texas' war for independence such as San Antonio or Houston was a more logical choice. Dallas had won the competition for the host city chiefly by its willingness and its ability to invest more money in the project than the other cities in the competition.³

The rivalry between Fort Worth and Dallas was so intense in the thirties that Amon Carter decided to put

²Jerry Flemmons, Amon, the Life of Amon Carter, Sr. of Texas (Austin, Tex., 1978), p. 299.

³Ibid.

on a show that would bring credit to Fort Worth; but more importantly, it would be held in direct competition to the Dallas exhibition. Although Carter certainly did not singlehandedly conceive the idea which eventually became Casa Mañana, it was he who had the drive and personal magnetism necessary to carry the idea through to its fruition.⁴ It was he also who hired Billy Rose, saving the Fort Worth centennial from becoming what surely would have been a rather forgettable and mediocre local pioneer celebration.

Billy Rose in 1936 was known chiefly as a world short-hand champion (although he actually was not) and as the husband of Ziegfield Follies star Fanny Brice.⁵ He had owned several nightclubs, had produced several shows of little note, and had been the chief organizer of the Songwriters Protective Association.⁶ In New York he was developing a reputation stemming from his talent for organizing other talented people. If he himself could not write, act, choreograph, orchestrate, sing, or dance, he did have a creativity of organization. His style was a combination of circus bigness along the lines of Ringling and Phineas Barnum, and pageantry combined with the glamour

⁴Interview with William O. Jary, Fort Worth historian and retired advertising executive, Fort Worth, Texas, October 15, 1980.

⁵Earl Conrad, Billy Rose, Manhattan Primitive (New York, 1968), pp. 28, 83.

⁶Ibid., pp. 60-61.

of a Ziegfield Follies production. This was leading him by 1936 to an entertainment concept that in future years was to revolutionize the production of shows across the United States. This style had evolved through increasingly larger productions over a period and had finally reached its fruition in Fort Worth with Casa Mañana.⁷ Billy Rose was beginning to live up to the title with which he had been dubbed by his press agents: the "Bantam Barnum."⁸ Years later Rose himself referred to Casa Mañana as "by all odds the best I've ever had my name on."⁹

The Billy Rose before Casa Mañana had not yet reached the national prominence he was to achieve in later years. He had brought Jumbo, a mildly successful show with Jimmy Durante, to Broadway into the old Hippodrome Theatre. Sources disagree as to how Amon Carter and Billy Rose met. One story says that Rose was introduced to Carter through Rufus LeMaire, a former Fort Worthian who in 1936 was the casting director of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios.¹⁰ Another version, according to Fort Worth historian William O. Jary, Jr., was that Carter was introduced to Rose by Paul Whiteman, who was Carter's old friend as well as a former employee of

⁷Ibid., p. 105.

⁸Ibid., p. 85.

⁹Billy Rose, quoted by Flemmons, Amon, p. 302.

¹⁰Flemmons, Amon, p. 302.

Rose.¹¹ Whatever the case, two entrepreneurs evidently recognized in each other a golden opportunity. One would promote his city; the other would promote himself.

In the opinion of Jary, Billy Rose was basically an opportunist. He came to Fort Worth because Amon Carter and the city fathers wanted him, but he cared nothing about the place. Billy Rose was known to go to enormous lengths to promote Billy Rose; and he saw in Fort Worth the money and the opportunity to do just that. If he had not created Casa Mañana in Fort Worth, he surely would have done it in the first city that made him the right offer.¹² Billy Rose needed an opportunity to display his talents and Amon Carter provided that opportunity. Hired by Carter at the then mind-boggling sum of \$1,000 a day for one hundred days, Rose was given carte blanche to put on what Damon Runyon later called "probably . . . the biggest and most original show ever seen in the United States."¹³

In 1936 Billy Rose was on the verge of causing a revolution in the thinking of American theatre producers, on the way to mount a show to achieve mass appeal.¹⁴ Richard Maney, one of Rose's countless press agents down through the

¹¹Interview with Jary, October 15, 1980.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Damon Runyon, quoted by Flemmons, Amon, p. 322.

¹⁴Conrad, Billy Rose, Manhattan Primitive, p. 105.

years, observed that most of Billy's shows were based on pageantry and a growing number of participants as time went on. Rose's twist was that this orchestrated splendor had a theme or loose story line to hold it together. Rose's biographer, Earl Conrad, gives Richard Maney the chief credit for the press build-up which directly led to Fort Worth's interest in securing Rose over some other producer. Rose was developing a national reputation in the mid-thirties for what Conrad termed "gigantism," and this is exactly what the Fort Worth city fathers needed if they were to compete with Dallas' \$25,000,000 exposition.¹⁵

The Frontier Fiesta, as the entire centennial celebration came to be called, was situated on forty acres of cow pasture west of the Trinity River and downtown Fort Worth and immediately east of the present Will Rogers Coliseum complex. One portion of the Fiesta was Casa Mañana, boasting the world's largest revolving stage, 130 feet in diameter (three times the size of the Radio City Music Hall stage) and weighing 17,000 tons.¹⁶ In fact nothing about this entertainment extravaganza was less than mammoth if it could be judged by the advance publicity that began to appear in newspapers all over the state. "Casa Mañana," the ads proclaimed,

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 105-106.

¹⁶Casa Mañana program, Fort Worth, Texas, 1936.

Unquestionably the House of Tomorrow . . . not only a Day, but a Decade in Advance of its Times . . . The Largest Cafe-Theatre Ever Constructed . . . Tables and Chairs for 4500 Amusement Lovers . . . A Gargantuan Revolving-Reciprocating Stage . . . Three and a Half Times Larger than that of Radio City Music Hall . . . Two 450 h.p. Motors Required to Operate this Leviathan of Rostrums, with its Lovely Freight of 250 Eye-bedeveling Coryphees over a Pool of Limpid Crystal containing 617,000 Gallons of Real Water . . . SPECTACLE and SONG, DANCE and COMEDY . . . Past Peradventure the BIGGEST GIRL SHOW EVER PRODUCED . . . Star-Studded with FOREMOST CELEBRITIES OF STAGE, SCREEN and RADIO.¹⁷

Beneath the text of the ad ran a picture of the supposed stage show in which a large number of the "eye-bedeveling coryphees" gamboled topless in the 617,000 gallons of "real water." This was, of course, entirely a fabrication, at least as far as the nude lovelies were concerned. They existed only in the rather fertile imagination of Ned Alvord, press agent extraordinaire. Alvord was known as "the deacon" in show business circles for his habit of wearing a cutaway coat and derby hat. For his stay in Fort Worth's summer heat, he had specially tailored a seersucker "tuxedo."¹⁸ Reputedly one of Alvord's favorite ploys was to drop into the composing room of a newspaper late at night when only the night crew was on duty. He would explain to whomever was in charge that the wrong picture had inadvertently been supplied to the paper for advertising and then he would make a

¹⁷Old Casa Mañana ad (1936) in the files of William O. Jary, retired advertising executive, Fort Worth, Texas.

¹⁸Interview with Jary, October 15, 1980.

substitution. The new picture would show scantily-clad females purportedly in the show.¹⁹ According to Fort Worth historian and retired advertising executive William O. Jary, Jr., "the advance promo on the Fort Worth Centennial must go down in history books as the wildest ever. A colorful brochure was produced . . . for all to know that Fort Worth was the place for entertainment; go to Dallas for culture."²⁰ As the young employee of a Fort Worth sign company in 1936, Jary became part of the excitement. When the company was commissioned by Billy Rose to design a neon sign, Jary was given the job. The resulting sign, 130 feet long and 60 feet high, was the world's second largest. It was placed brazenly atop a building in Dallas, opposite the main entrance of the state Centennial Exposition. The huge blinking sign pictured an animated bucking bronco and the message, "Forty-five minutes west to Whoopee."²¹

The stage engineering for the "leviathan of rostrums" was designed by Richard Bruckner, a Russian immigrant who had previously engineered the equipment for Rose's Jumbo.²² A complete revolution of the massive stage required one minute and forty-five seconds. The stage rested on metal

¹⁹Conrad, Billy Rose, Manhattan Primitive, p. 89.

²⁰Interview with Jary, October 15, 1980.

²¹Ibid.

²²Casa Mañana program, Fort Worth, Texas, 1936.

tracks in a tank of water nine feet deep. The tracks permitted it to "float" toward or away from the audience.²³

There was one 450-horsepower motor to control the revolutions of the stage and another, equally powerful, to "float" the car which moved the stage forward and backward on its tracks.²⁴ The lagoon on which the stage appeared to float was 130 feet wide and 175 feet long. Canals leading to the pool opened with drawbridges, through which golden gondolas glided in the finale of each evening's entertainment. The center structure of the revolving stage was a permanent theatrical set and bandstand combined, with dressing rooms located below. Its actual 4,364,000 pounds of dead weight were the reasons for the huge motors required to move the stage.²⁵

One of the gondoliers in the 1936 Casa Mañana was J. D. Farmer. According to Farmer, as one scene was being viewed by the audience, another scene was being readied on the portion of the stage not visible. At the conclusion of a scene, as the stage began to revolve, performers dashed madly to specially provided quick-change rooms where they had only the time it took the stage to complete its revolution to change and race to their positions for the next

²³Ibid.

²⁴Fort Worth Star-Telegram, April 1, 1936.

²⁵Casa Mañana program, Fort Worth, Texas, 1936.

scene.²⁶ Because it was an outdoor amphitheatre, Casa Mañana did not have the conventional curtain closing between acts. Instead, forty separate jets of water rimming the moat provided a "water curtain" between scenes. Colored spotlights could then be projected on the shimmering display, adding to its beauty.²⁷

In front of the outdoor stage was an outdoor cafe large enough to accommodate 4,000 diners and dancers. Box seats were located in a two-story row of seventy-two covered arches flanking the entire 320 foot perimeter of the theatre. The frontal facade of the theatre alone was 280 feet across.²⁸

If Billy Rose was not universally well-liked, he was admired for his ability to organize a show much larger than his own diminutive stature (he stood barely five feet, two inches) and then to obtain the best qualified individuals to put it together for him. Several of the staff he assembled for the Frontier Fiesta had worked with Rose before on Broadway in his production of Jumbo. One of these was Casa Mañana's director, John Murray Anderson. Anderson had produced some of the leading musicals of the 1920s, had directed the Ziegfield Follies, and had directed Paul

²⁶Interview with J. D. Farmer, 1936 Casa Mañana performer, Fort Worth, Texas, November 3, 1980.

²⁷Interview with Jary, October 15, 1980.

²⁸Fort Worth Star-Telegram, April 1, 1936.

Whiteman's movie The King of Jazz, the first all-color motion picture.²⁹ Anderson's formula consisted of visual splendor,

a slender story line, comedy, escapism, and laughter.

According to Billy Rose's biographer Earl Conrad, it was Anderson who had the eye and taste for expansive and glittery pageantry to match Billy's own tastes. Unlike Billy, however, he also had the ability to realize his visions in terms of color, design, choreography, and story.³⁰

The two men were a study in contrasts. Anderson was erudite, cosmopolitan, and serious; he was every inch the gentleman. Rose, on the other hand, was brash and a bully, getting his way mainly through bluster. As Rose's reputation as a producer grew, Anderson, the man actually executing those dreams, tended to be forgotten. Nevertheless, Anderson stayed with Rose for two decades following the Texas centennial, evidently because Rose allowed him full and free expression of his abilities.³¹ This artistic bond, rather than one of friendship, held two very opposite personalities together, but the partnership was not without its explosive moments. Following a heated argument during Billy's production of Cleveland's Aquacade in 1937, Rose reportedly taunted, "I have a fistful of money. What have you got?" Anderson replied, "I have one friend."³²

²⁹Casa Mañana program, Fort Worth, Texas, 1936.

³⁰Conrad, Billy Rose, Manhattan Primitive, p. 125.

³¹Ibid., pp. 125-126.

³²Ibid., p. 126.

Anderson's style of directing was a rare combination of wit and sarcasm. Watching Anderson's rehearsals of the Casa Mañana performers and showgirls reportedly became a favorite pastime of newsmen assigned to cover the goings-on. Anderson seldom referred to anyone by his or her real name, preferring rather to give them nicknames reflecting some personality or physical trait. Names such as Dry Ice, Goo-Goo, Eyebrows, and Chigger were common; but perhaps the best known was Stuttering Sam, Anderson's nickname for Mary Louise Dowell, the daughter of Fort Worth's police chief. Dowell later went on to become a top New York showgirl.³³

The designer for Casa Mañana had also worked with Jumbo. Albert Johnson had been secured by Rose to transform New York's venerable old Hippodrome Theatre for that show. In Fort Worth he designed all of the buildings and concessions of the Frontier Fiesta as well as the sets for the Casa Mañana show. At the time of his coming to Fort Worth, he was the artistic director of Radio City Music Hall. In addition he had designed for such notables as Lee Shubert and the Ben Hecht-Charles MacArthur team in their movies Crime without Passion and The Scoundrel.³⁴

Music for the revue was provided by Paul Whiteman and his orchestra assisted by the Joe Venuti orchestra. Whiteman,

³³Flemmons, Amon, p. 312.

³⁴Casa Mañana program, Fort Worth, Texas, 1936.

who was the primary conductor, conducted his orchestra with a special lighted baton. Joe Venuti's orchestra was relegated to a secondary role, which evidently bothered some members of the latter's group. One evening in revenge, Venuti's musicians presented him with a 500-watt light bulb mounted on the end of a broomstick, which Venuti then used to conduct during the performance. Reportedly the two orchestra leaders did not speak for some time following the incident.³⁵ At intermission and following the revue each evening, the two bands provided music for patrons' dancing pleasure on the huge stage.

Costumes for the entire extravaganza were designed by youthful Raoul Pene Du Bois, who at the age of only twenty-four already had to his credit Radio City Music Hall and the 1934 Ziegfield Follies. Dance director was Robert Alton, and the musical numbers for the show were written by twenty-one-year-old Dana Suesse. Suesse was equally at home with both classical and popular music. When only seventeen, she had debuted at Carnegie Hall with her "Waltz Rhapsody." In addition she had several popular hits to her credit, including "You Ought to Be in Pictures" and "Whistling in the Dark."³⁶ One of her tunes, "The Night Is Young and

³⁵Interview with Melvin O. Dacus, former general manager-producer of Casa Mañana, 1958-1974, Fort Worth, Texas, September 23, 1980.

³⁶Casa Mañana program, Fort Worth, Texas, 1936.

"You're So Beautiful," became the unofficial theme song of Casa Mañana. The number reportedly was composed in only one evening when the Casa Mañana revue was stuck for a big number.³⁷

The "Cavalcade of World Fairs," as the Casa Mañana stage show was called in 1936, was loosely plotted around the story of a honeymooning couple, portrayed by Everett Marshall and Texas Sweetheart Faye Cotton, who traveled to several world fairs. Cotton, who had been selected in a promotional beauty contest by Billy Rose as Texas Sweetheart, wore a \$5,000 gold lamé dress weighing forty pounds and designed by New York jewelers Whiting and Davis.³⁸ As the couple traveled from fair to fair they encountered such stars as Ann Pennington, who danced as Little Egypt in one scene and later emerged from a papier-mâché "100 gallon hat." Sally Rand performed her famous nude dances, carrying only fans or balloons, and bathed in her trademark blue spotlight. Miss Rand had built a reputation for allowing the audience to see only exactly what she wished behind the fans.³⁹ Other featured performers included Gomez and Winona, Walter Dere Wahl, the Lime Trio, Gareth Joplin, and the Californians.⁴⁰

³⁷Flemmons, Amon, p. 324.

³⁸Casa Mañana program, Fort Worth, Texas, 1936.

³⁹New York Times, September 1, 1979, p. 12.

⁴⁰Casa Mañana program, Fort Worth, Texas, 1936.

The entire program was divided into four scenes with songs and musical numbers appropriate to the place and time depicted:

SCENE 1
"The Saint Louis World Fair"
(1904)

1. "Meet Me in St. Louis, Louis"--The Californians
2. "The Saint Louis Blues"
3. "The Good Old Summer Time"
4. "Oh! You Beautiful Doll"
5. "Daisy, Daisy"
6. "Why Do They Call Me a Gibson Girl?"
7. "Frankie and Johnnie"
8. "There'll Be a Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight"
9. "Egyptians"--danced by Ann Pennington
10. "The Night Is Young"--sung by Everett Marshall with Texas Number One Sweetheart Faye Cotton
11. "Dance"--Gareth Joplin

SCENE 2
"The Paris Fair"
(1925)

1. "You're in Paree"
2. "Le Can-Can"
3. "Le valse" (ballet)--Gomez and Winona

SCENE 3
"The Chicago Century of Progress"
(1933-1934)

1. "It Happened in Chicago"
2. "You're Like a Toy Balloon"--The Californians with Faye Cotton
3. "Ballet Divertisement"--Sally Rand and corps de ballet

SCENE 4

"The Fort Worth Frontier Centennial Celebration"

1. "Another Mile"--Everett Marshall
2. "A Masque of Texas"
3. "Lone Star"--Everett Marshall and the Californians
4. "Finale"--the entire Company⁴¹

The finale of the program, the most grandiose scene of all, was a procession involving the entire company. According to Star-Telegram writer Jerry Flemmons:

. . . the . . . fountains exploded with colored water, the six flags under which Texas served paraded and waved, and Marshall sang "Lone Star" as gondoliers poled gondolas across the lagoon. The spectacle was so awesome nobody ever wondered why Venetian-type boatmen appeared in a western scene.⁴²

The Casa Mañana outdoor amphitheatre, although probably the chief attraction, was only one of several diversions available for the amusement and enlightenment of patrons. In addition there was the Pioneer Palace, actually a saloon, where customers could drink ten-cent beer, play illegal slot machines, or even watch pig races on the forty-foot long bar.⁴³ Behind the bar was a long, mirrored stage. These mirrors could be rolled back much like a garage door to expose a second stage.⁴⁴ The chorus line of the Pioneer

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Flemmons, Amon, p. 324.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Interview with Dacus, September 23, 1980.

Palace was in direct contrast to the lithesome lovelies of the Casa Mañana theatre. The smallest of the Six Tiny Rosebuds, as they were called, weighed 215 pounds; the largest weighed 340.⁴⁵

There was also the Last Frontier, an outdoor wild-west show supposedly depicting the old west as it really was. It was an incongruous combination of Broadway show tunes hitched to a rodeo, Indian attacks, a stage holdup, trick riding and roping, a small buffalo herd, and sixty-eight teams of square dancers.⁴⁶ The advertising once again was grandiose:

A Vivid Visual Sage of the March of Civilization--The Old West Lives Again. The Mail Goes Through . . . Attack of the Hostiles . . . Womanhood in Jeopardy-- Thank God the Rangers! Battle of Arryo [sic] Grande . . . and the Mail goes through.⁴⁷

The only indoor show of the Frontier Festival was also the only show that was not truly successful; but someone in hiring Billy Rose neglected mentioning the heat of a Texas summer. Ironically, it was his own production, Jumbo, imported to Texas from New York, that suffered.⁴⁸ The round building in which it was housed was painted bright red. Its peaked roof had serrated edges meant to resemble a circus tent.

⁴⁵Flemmons, Amon, p. 324.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 325.

⁴⁷Old Casa Mañana ad, 1936, in files of Jary.

⁴⁸Flemmons, Amon, p. 320.

Four matching towers were located at the four corners of the building. The show, which ran two hours and twenty minutes, had to be cut to one hour only three days after opening when the show's star, Eddie Foy, Jr., threatened to quit and several chorus girls fainted in the heat.⁴⁹

One of the most popular exhibits of the event was Sally Rand's Nude Ranch, which was advertised as an "educational exhibit."⁵⁰ Local ministers decried Sally's activities before the city council while business boomed steadily at the Nude Ranch. Housed comfortably in a re-created ranch house, eighteen girls, nude from the waist up, lounged, played games, or sat on horses. A floor-to-ceiling wire screen wall separated patrons from the girls.⁵¹ The fifth major attraction of the Frontier Fiesta was a reconstructed frontier town containing a church, a barbershop, and a general store.⁵²

The Fort Worth Frontier Centennial opened officially July 18, 1936, several weeks behind the huge Dallas exhibition. Cutting the "ribbon" to officially open Sunset Trail, the main entrance of the exhibition, was one of Amon Carter's old cronies, President of the United States Franklin D. Roosevelt. FDR, who was unable to attend the celebration in person, was fishing off the coast of Nova Scotia in his yacht

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 317.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Interview with Dacus, September 23, 1980.

the Sewanna. Nevertheless, at precisely 3:30 P.M. Central time, Roosevelt pushed a button to send an electrical impulse beaming across the United States by way of a Maine relay station to Fort Worth. At the same moment, at the entrance to Sunset Trail, a lasso was automatically snapped.⁵³ Casa Mañana ran for nearly four months in 1936, finally closing on November 15 with the coming of cold weather.

Efforts to Continue Casa Mañana

The next year the city of Fort Worth once again contracted with Billy Rose to produce Casa Mañana. Jumbo and the Last Frontier were shut down permanently but Pioneer Palace remained open. With John Murray Anderson once again directing, Billy presented a revue based on several then-famous books including Gone with the Wind and Lost Horizon. Margaret Mitchell sued Rose, claiming he had used her book without permission; but he managed to settle with her for a few thousand dollars.⁵⁴ In 1938 and again in 1939 Casa Mañana continued to run but without the benefit of Billy Rose and his retinue. Top Vaudeville headliners, including Eddie Cantor, Edgar Bergen, Ray Bolger, and Martha Raye, were booked into the amphitheatre for two-week or three-week engagements.⁵⁵ The last entertainer to play the theatre was

⁵³Flemmons, Amon, p. 320.

⁵⁴Conrad, Billy Rose, Manhattan Primitive, p. 107.

⁵⁵Interview with Jary, October 13, 1980.

Morton Downey. At the end of 1939 the giant structure, which had never been intended as anything more than temporary since no one could have foreseen its immense success and popularity, was shuttered forever.⁵⁶

Through 1940 and 1941 several efforts were made to reopen Casa Mañana, and a bond issue was proposed which would have voted \$225,000 to reconstruct the amphitheatre as a permanent structure. The Star-Telegram ran an editorial in favor of the election, arguing that "if the structure is not made permanent now the cost of so making it later will be prohibitive due to rapid deterioration and a huge investment will have been lost."⁵⁷ Various citizen and church groups opposed the proposition, however, stating as their chief arguments the high cost of holding an election, the likelihood of a tax increase as a result, and the fact that the theatre had lost \$1,100,000 for its investors. Perhaps the most damaging argument of all, however, was the questionable wisdom of using valuable construction materials for an entertainment facility when these same materials were being earmarked for defense and being denied even for new homes.⁵⁸

As a result of this opposition the issue never reached the polls. On November 5, 1941, the City Council postponed

⁵⁶Flemmons, Amon, p. 330.

⁵⁷Fort Worth Star-Telegram, November 3, 1941.

⁵⁸Ibid., November 4, 1941.

the question of the bond election indefinitely, in effect killing the issue. Then on December 7, 1941, the United States entered World War II and the plans for a revival of Casa Mañana died. The following year demolition began on the framework of the once magnificent amphitheatre, leaving only the huge skeleton of the revolving stage to rust for the next decade.⁵⁹

Interest in Casa Mañana Revives Following World War II

Casa Mañana's impact on Fort Worth was destined not to be forgotten, however. Following the end of the war in 1945, while the tide of optimism sweeping America was still at its height, the bond issue to rebuild Casa Mañana was revived. While not specifically mentioning the old theatre by name, the issue called for a principal sum of \$500,000 for the purpose of "constructing, building and equipping a recreation center and amphitheatre for said city and acquiring the necessary land therefor."⁶⁰ The amphitheatre issue was attached to a \$1,500,000 bond election proposal whose principal stated purpose was "constructing, improving and equipping agricultural and livestock exhibit buildings," for the Southwestern Exposition and Fat Stock Show.⁶¹

⁵⁹Interview with Jary, October 13, 1980.

⁶⁰Ordinance 2378, City of Fort Worth, September 5, 1945.

⁶¹Ibid.

The issue came before the voters October 2, 1945, and passed, but the \$500,000 in bonds for the construction of the amphitheatre were never sold.⁶² As life returned to normal and men returned from the war, Fort Worth resumed everyday life again. Gradually the unsold entertainment bonds were forgotten.

Meanwhile following the war, patterns in the professional theatre were changing. New trends were being established that would come to dominate the fifties and sixties. The postwar period ushered in the era of the musical's dominance.⁶³ In 1943 Oklahoma! had renewed the dreams of producers, writers, and investors hoping for similar glory and profits.⁶⁴ The public had also caught the fever and were eagerly buying tickets far in advance for each new musical that Broadway produced. South Pacific in 1949 had an advance sale of \$300,000, which for that time was phenomenal.⁶⁵

The great successes of the postwar years merely served to underline the high standards being achieved by musicals. Between 1945 and 1951, several unprecedented hits arrived on Broadway which were to become staples of the musical

⁶²Interview with Dacus, September 23, 1980.

⁶³Howard Taubman, The Making of the American Theatre (New York, 1967), p. 266.

⁶⁴Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers, Oklahoma, 1943.

⁶⁵Taubman, The Making of the American Theatre, p. 266.

theatre for decades. These hits included Annie Get Your Gun, Kiss Me Kate, and The King and I.⁶⁶ The trend did not end until the late fifties, which produced several more remarkable smash hit musicals including West Side Story, The Sound of Music, Camelot, and My Fair Lady.⁶⁷

In the years following World War II another major movement in the American theatre had begun sweeping the country. This trend toward music tents, or the music circus movement, influenced the decision to ultimately use the dormant bond money to rebuild Casa Mañana as a theatre-in-the-round.⁶⁸ Credit for the first successful musical tent is generally agreed to belong to St. John Terrell, a former carnival fire-eater and radio's Jack Armstrong, who opened his "Music Circus" in Lambertville, New Jersey, in 1949.⁶⁹ During World War II, after being discharged from the armed services due to injuries, Terrell had joined the USO. He had discovered that

⁶⁶ Herbert Fields and Dorothy Fields, Annie Get Your Gun, 1946, lyrics and music by Irving Berlin; Alan Jay Lerner, Brigadoon, 1947, music by Frederick Loewe; Samuel Spewack and Bella Spewack, Kiss Me Kate, 1948, lyrics and music by Cole Porter; Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers, The King and I, 1951.

⁶⁷ Arthur Laurents, West Side Story, 1957, lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, music by Leonard Bernstein; Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse, The Sound of Music, 1959, lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II, music by Richard Rodgers; Alan Jay Lerner, Camelot, 1960, music by Alan Jay Lerner, lyrics by Frederick Loewe; Alan Jay Lerner, My Fair Lady, 1956, music by Frederick Loewe.

⁶⁸ Interview with Dacus, September 23, 1980.

⁶⁹ David Dachs, "Ten Years of the Music Tents," Saturday Review, XLI (May 31, 1958), 38.

many troops were being deprived of seeing USO shows in remote bases because there was never a large enough stage. Remembering his circus days, Terrell suggested digging out a saucer of earth and then erecting a tent. The actors could then perform in the middle with the audience sitting around them. The idea was promptly turned down by the USO; but after the war Terrell used his back pay, cashed in war bonds, and borrowed money on his family's business to demonstrate that his idea of musicals in a tent was a workable proposition.⁷⁰

In creating his music circus, Terrell was looking for a way around the huge production costs normally associated with musicals. The fact that scenery in arena theatre was almost vestigial struck Terrell as an advantage: "Scenery never brought a nickel into the theatre. In fact the high production costs have weighed the theatre down."⁷¹ To Terrell an ornate building was unimportant. By Terrell's philosophy the most important purpose of a play became to display the actor properly and to have a good story and music.⁷²

Actually the idea of a round tent theatre was not a new one at all, having a vague architectural relationship to the circuses of ancient Rome and the theatres of Greece.⁷³ It

⁷⁰Gordon Allison, "Music Circus," Theatre Arts, XXXV (June, 1951), 89.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 92.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Allardyce Nicoll, The Development of the Theatre (New York, 1966), pp. 237-239.

bore an even closer resemblance to arena theatre, a European import which was becoming popular in America. Some of the pioneers of arena theatre in the United States included Glenn Hughes, who had opened his Penthouse Theatre in Seattle, Washington, in 1932, and Margo Jones, whose Theatre '51 won wide acclaim in Dallas, Texas, in 1951.⁷⁴ A third close tie was with the American circus and the Chautauqua from which the tent was derived.⁷⁵

Evidently the public agreed with Terrell's concepts despite the initial scoffing of Broadway critics and old-timers. In 1949 there was only one musical tent; but by 1958, when Casa Mañana wedded the old outdoor cabaret of the 1936 centennial celebration to Terrell's concept, there were twenty-seven canvas-top theatres in operation, with six more scheduled for opening that same summer. In the ten seasons since 1949, thirteen million Americans had thronged to see well-known musicals and operettas for an estimated box-office profit of \$25,000,000. Originally theatrical "experts" had prophesied that the tent movement was a novelty which would quickly wear off, but in 1958 it was estimated that three million Americans would queue up outside the tents.⁷⁶

⁷⁴Walden P. Boyle, Central and Flexible Staging (Los Angeles, 1956), pp. 16-17.

⁷⁵Allison, "Music Circus," p. 46.

⁷⁶Dachs, "Ten Years of the Music Tents," p. 37.

The lure of the tents was irresistible for several reasons. One was the combination of intimacy and casualness not available in larger proscenium structures. The theatre seats were generally only folding chairs and the floors were dirt covered with straw; but no seat was ever further from the stage than fifteen or sixteen rows. Patrons dressed "down" rather than "up." Slacks, shorts, or sport clothes were not considered out of place. Another extremely attractive feature was the price. For as little as ninety cents an individual could see a show, or an entire family could attend for the price of one orchestra seat to a Broadway show.⁷⁷ Casa Mañana opened at the height of this popularity, offering many of the same features of the music tents, yet in a plush permanent setting as America's first permanent musical theatre-in-the-round.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 39.

CHAPTER II

AN OLD IDEA IS REBORN

The Inception of Casa Mañana Musicals, Incorporated

Another, and perhaps overriding, factor in the success of the music tents and of Casa Mañana's early success was the opportuneness of the period. In 1958 many of the best shows of the golden age of American musical theatre had been written in the past fifteen years and were becoming available for summer stock.¹ If it were not for this fact and the fact that the Fort Worth Opera Association in 1957 was desperately seeking for a way to offset its operating deficits, Casa Mañana might never have reopened. The \$500,000 in bonds for an entertainment facility, which had lain dormant since 1945, might never have been sold.²

In 1954, following the Korean War, Melvin O. Dacus had returned from New York and was working in television locally when he was approached by the president of the Fort Worth Opera Association, James M. Snowden. Snowden, a local oil man, felt that he could not continue to handle all of the responsibilities of the Opera Association on a strictly

¹Dachs, "Ten Years of the Music Tents," p. 39.

²Interview with Dacus, September 23, 1980.

volunteer basis, and approached Dacus to become the full-time manager of the Association.³

During the period of 1954-1957 when not producing or promoting opera, Dacus' chief responsibilities included fund raising. One of his chief worries was what the association could do in the summertime to raise money when the opera was often the furthest thing from the public's mind. One of the operas on the 1957 season featured Colee Worth, a comedian who later was to appear many times on the Casa Mañana stage. One day during the run of the opera, Worth and Dacus were having coffee in the old Worth Hotel and the conversation turned to the success of St. John Terrell's Music Circus in Lambertville, New Jersey. Worth, who lived in nearby Morristown, suggested that a similar theatre might be successful in Fort Worth and invited Dacus to visit the theatre, promising an introduction to Terrell.⁴

Following the 1957 opera season, with James Snowden's approval, Dacus traveled to several successful music tent operations including Cleveland, to see Johnny Price's Music Carnival, Flint, Michigan, and several other cities; but chiefly he went to Lambertville, New Jersey, to see the original Music Circus and to talk with its founder, St. John Terrell. When Dacus visited the Music Circus, the season was over. The tent was down and all that could be seen of

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

the theatre was a tiered cement slab and the circus wagons used for concessions and dressing rooms. Still he learned enough to become excited about the possibilities of the same type of theatre being built in Fort Worth. He learned that private producers were making profits ranging from \$15 to \$100,000 in a summertime, offering anywhere from ten to sixteen weeks of operettas.⁵

When Snowden saw the information that Dacus had gathered, he felt the idea had enough merit to begin a search for a suitable site. Still no thought had been given to making the theatre a permanent structure, since all of the theatres-in-the-round at the time were in tents. One of the sites given strong consideration was Forest Park, on the bank of the Trinity River, where there was an ideal large, green, open space available. The only problem still to be surmounted was the Texas heat. Pitching a tent in New England was one thing, but pitching a tent in Texas was another thing altogether. Engineers were consulted on the feasibility of installing fans or air-conditioning to cool the hot canvas, but it was finally determined that this was impractical and the idea of musicals, at least under an outdoor tent, was abandoned.⁶

In the summer of 1957 a newspaper article in the Fort Worth Star-Telegram caught the eye of Dacus. The article

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

concerned the aluminum geodesic dome, a revolutionary new form of construction pioneered by Richard Buckminster Fuller and Kaiser Aluminum. Clipping the article from the paper, Dacus sent it to Snowden who was in Europe at the time. Snowden liked the idea well enough that he requested Dacus to contact the Kaiser Aluminum Company to obtain cost and construction data. By the time Snowden returned from Europe, it had been determined that the idea was indeed feasible if only the capital for the construction could be raised, a suitable site decided upon, and the city sold on the idea. The site seemed to be no problem. What better spot than on or close to the site of the original Casa Mañana? The site in question was used only thirty days out of each year by the Stock Show, which had a lease on it for the Stock Show carnival.⁷ In tackling the problem of working capital, Snowden remembered the old bond election held in 1945. The principal reason the bonds had never been used was the failure of any group to submit a suitable plan to retire the bonds.⁸ Snowden set about to convince the City Council that he could do just that.

About that time what was known as the Gruen Plan was under serious consideration for the city of Fort Worth. The Gruen Plan was in effect a \$25,000,000 renewal program for

⁷Fort Worth Press, January 17, 1958.

⁸Fort Worth Star-Telegram, November 14, 1957.

the upgrading of the downtown area of the city.⁹ It included the construction of a convention center and the improvement of hotels. The Downtown Fort Worth Association was especially interested in building a convention center, which led Snowden to think of building not just one of the geodesic domes, but two. Snowden took his idea to the city manager and was immediately turned down.¹⁰

Still Snowden persisted, and after numerous rejections by the city manager, he finally aroused enough interest in the mayor, Tom McCann, so that McCann agreed to at least explore the idea. For that purpose he appointed a committee comprised of dairyman J. J. Niles, real estate man Gus Jackson, and Jesse E. Roach, a member of the City Council.¹¹

The two-dome plan was submitted to the City Council in November of 1957 in the form of a well-planned brochure entitled "Casa Mañana '58." The brochure pointed out a number of advantages to be gained from such a center including the attraction of new industry to Fort Worth, helping make the city more attractive as a convention center, and providing a professional outlet for young people interested in the performing arts.¹²

⁹ Ibid., October 18, 1957.

¹⁰ Interview with Dacus, September 23, 1980.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² "Casa Mañana '58," unpublished four-page brochure presented to the Fort Worth City Council, November, 1957.

In the brochure the directors of the Fort Worth Opera Association specifically proposed that the management of the "Entertainment and Convention Center" be handled by an independent non-profit corporation, the earnings of which would be devoted to civic and cultural purposes. The city would build the Center, as had been authorized by the voters in 1945, and would lease it to Casa Mañana Productions, Inc., which would rent the facility for an annual figure of \$25,000. This sum would be sufficient to pay off the necessary bonds within a period of twenty-five years. It was further proposed that members of the City Council should be ex officio members of the board of Casa Mañana in order to protect the city's interest.¹³

The brochure went on to point out the advantages such a theatre would have over a more conventional proscenium stage, mentioning the intimacy achieved in arena staging between the audience and actors; but perhaps the strongest argument presented was the fact that as a permanent facility rather than a tent like other summer operations, the Casa Mañana Center would have the distinction of being the first of its kind in the world. As such, it would be likely to generate national and even foreign interest in Fort Worth.¹⁴

The Center itself as proposed would include a playhouse in the half-round and an exhibition and banquet pavilion,

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

each housed in a Kaiser aluminum geodesic dome and connected by a central building containing foyer space, offices, and committee and meeting rooms for conventions. The seating capacity of the theatre was to be about 1,300, and in addition it was to be equipped with Cinerama and Todd-A-O for the presentation of widescreen motion pictures. For years the dilapidated old Pioneer Palace, the only building remaining from the 1936 Centennial Celebration, had been used for welfare and youth functions; and the brochure pointed out that with a modern facility such as the proposed center, this eyesore could be demolished and Casa Mañana Center could take over the role.¹⁵

The Downtown Fort Worth Association, the Junior Chamber of Commerce, and the Hotel Owners Association continued to be strenuously opposed to the proposal, fearing that it would disrupt the plans for the \$25,000,000 expansion of the downtown area. One civic leader in particular, Sam Cantey III, warned, "If you build it (the Center), in six months you'll be storing hay out there for Billy Bob Watt," a reference to the manager of the Fort Worth Stock Show.¹⁶

The theatre remained a hot political football for several months through the end of 1957 and into the early part of 1958, but finally on January 17, 1958, the bonds

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Interview with Dacus, September 23, 1980. (Later when Casa produced The Pajama Game in 1958, the number entitled "Haybaler" was dedicated to Cantey.)

to build the theatre were approved by a unanimous vote of the City Council.¹⁷ The proposal was approved subject to several conditions, including:

1. That a non-profit organization separate from the opera association be formed which would run the operation on a twelve-month basis rather than on a seasonal basis such as the opera was run.
2. That a corporation be formed which would have a minimum of \$100,000 working capital.
3. That the corporation would sign a lease with the city for an amount sufficient to amortize the building in twenty-five years without cost to the taxpayers of Fort Worth.¹⁸

In addition, the city required the bonds to be sold at a rate of 4 percent interest or less, and a lease agreement had to be worked out with the Stock Show for the building site.¹⁹

The plan, however, for a two-dome theatre-convention center was abandoned in favor of a theatre only, which would be in the round rather than the half-round. When the idea had been explored, it had been discovered that construction costs had increased four to five times since 1945, when the \$500,000 had been voted. What might have been built in 1945 for that amount now was estimated to cost about two to two and one-half million dollars.²⁰ The single-domed theatre was still estimated to run over the \$500,000 but only by a

¹⁷ Fort Worth Star-Telegram, January 1, 1958.

¹⁸ Interview with Dacus, September 23, 1980.

¹⁹ Fort Worth Press, January 17, 1958.

²⁰ Interview with Dacus, September 23, 1980.

small amount, which the members of Casa Mañana Musicals, Inc., as the new corporation was to be called, would pay.²¹

A Site Is Selected and Construction Begins

One thing that was explored by the original committee appointed by Mayor McCann was the site of the new theatre, and there an unexpected snag was hit. The site that seemed most ideal, just a few feet from where the old Casa Mañana had stood, now seemed in contradiction to the needs of the Fort Worth Stock Show even though the area was only the tip end of the carnival area. When the committee approached Billy Bob Watt, Sr., the general manager of the Stock Show, he was less than happy. Nevertheless, he escorted them to various sites and suggested other locations. One of the proposed sites was between the Fort Worth Art Museum and what was then the Children's Museum, on the western corner of the Will Rogers Complex. Jesse Roach, however, was especially adamant that wherever the theatre was built, it must be highly visible, and the museum site was obscured by trees and other buildings.²²

Later a meeting was held in Mayor McCann's office. Among those in attendance were Billy Bob Watt, James Snowden, McCann, the city manager, Dacus, and Amon Carter, Jr., who was the chairman of the board of the Stock Show. Carter

²¹Fort Worth Star-Telegram, March 12, 1958.

²²Interview with Dacus, September 23, 1980.

listened to the various sites being proposed, and at the end of the discussion, over Watt's objections, agreed with the committee that the site of the original Casa Mañana, the site originally chosen and the one hoped for, would be leased to the theatre group.²³

James Snowden has been described by James Fuller, the second president of Casa Mañana Musicals, as not only the founder of Casa Mañana but its financial father as well.²⁴ Within the thirty days following the approval of the sale of the bonds, largely through the personal efforts of Snowden, the \$100,000 starting capital was raised through the sale of \$500 corporate bonds.²⁵

On February 21, 1958, following the sale of the corporate bonds, when it was known that there would indeed be working capital for the building and opening of the theatre, a charter was obtained for Casa Mañana Musicals, Inc. The officers and executive committee of Casa Mañana Musicals, Inc. were also announced. They included

President, James Snowden
 Vice President, Ernest Allen
 Secretary, Elizabeth Gann
 Treasurer, Elmer Lockwood

²³ Interview with Dacus, September 23, 1980.

²⁴ Interview with James C. Fuller, Former President of Casa Mañana Musicals, Inc., Fort Worth, Texas, August 7, 1980.

²⁵ Interview with Dacus, September 23, 1980.

Executive Committee, Mayor Tom McCann,
Jesse Roach,
August Esenwein,
Mrs. Otto Sparks,²⁶
and W. L. Stewart

On March 12, 1958, following the submission of sealed bids, the contract for the construction of the new theatre was awarded to Butcher and Sweeney Construction Company and work began almost immediately, since it was hoped the theatre could be ready for an opening in June.²⁷ Work on the foundation and structure of the theatre progressed rapidly, and by the third week in April construction had advanced so rapidly that the dome was ready to be raised. Construction was slowed only briefly when iron workers walked off the job on May 6 in a jurisdictional dispute over whether sheet metal workers previously hired, or iron workers, should be in charge of assembling the aluminum dome. By the next day, however, the dispute had been settled and most of the workers were back on the job.²⁸

City newspapers reported daily the progress of the dome as sections were assembled and the roof was then raised toward its final position.²⁹ Meanwhile, behind the new theatre as the dome went up, one of the last sad remnants

²⁶Minutes of first meeting of the executive committee of Casa Mañana Musicals, Inc., Fort Worth, Texas, February 26, 1958.

²⁷Fort Worth Star-Telegram, March 12, 1958.

²⁸Ibid., May 7, 1958.

²⁹Ibid.

of the once magnificent Casa Mañana of 1936 was being dismantled for the last time. The huge steel framework of the old revolving stage had been sold. Part of the steel was to be used in new construction, although most was to be resold as scrap. It had lain unused for eighteen years since the close of Casa Mañana's final season in 1939.³⁰

Preparations Begin for the 1958 Season

In February of 1958, before construction on Casa Mañana had even begun, a five-show season had been outlined for the theatre and the names of the five shows announced. The musical chosen to inaugurate the first season of the theatre was Can-Can, to be followed by productions of Carousel, Pajama Game, Merry Widow, and finally Call Me Madam.³¹

In addition, the staff for the first season had been announced. It included musical director, William Baer; choreographer, Joann Mann; set designer, Hal Shafer; and costumer Evelyn Norton Anderson. The director chosen to inaugurate the season was thirty-five-year-old Michael Pollock.³²

³⁰Ibid., May 1, 1958.

³¹Ibid., February 7, 1958. Oscar Hammerstein II, Carousel, music by Richard Rodgers, 1945; George Abbott and Richard Bissel, The Pajama Game, music and lyrics by Richard Burrows; Abe, Can-Can, music and lyrics by Cole Porter, 1953; Victor Leon and Leo Stein, Merry Widow, music by Franz Lehar, 1907; Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse, Call Me Madam, music and lyrics by Irving Berlin.

³²Minutes of the executive committee, Casa Mañana Musicals, Inc., February 26, 1958.

At the time Michael Pollock came to Casa Mañana, he was the artistic director of the New York City Opera Company. In his career he had been an orchestral musician, a chorus member, a grand opera and operetta principal, and a director of staging with the New York City Opera Company. During World War II he had served in Naval Intelligence and played French horn with the Honolulu Symphony. After the war he had studied voice with Estelle Liebling and William Brady, and along the way had sung in nightclubs and Broadway shows, but had eventually turned to opera. With the New York City Opera he had started in the chorus and had finally moved up to parts, but by then his interests had turned to directing. In his third season with the company he had directed The Ballad of Baby Doe and Susannah, and both had received outstanding reviews for his directorial techniques and innovative freshness.³³

Beginning in 1958 and continuing for several years, much of the casting of major roles for production was done in New York City. Pollock has stated that the reason for this was the fact that New York was the center for legitimate theatre, with most of the agents, both Broadway and off-Broadway, being located there. In later years as the theatre became better known and began to build a reputation, actors and actresses began to mail brochures, résumés, and pictures to

³³ Fort Worth Star-Telegram, July 14, 1958.

the theatre hoping, to be hired.³⁴ The rush to work at Casa Mañana in later years included not just unknowns but top-flight stars. Reportedly Tony Bennett offered to work for union scale in 1958 if Pollock would cast him in Carousel.³⁵ However, even at that time the theatre was establishing what was to become its long-standing unofficial policy of purposely hiring the most suitable actor for the role rather than a "name" star. Pollock was a strong advocate of this policy, stating:

"We think more of our audience than that. We want the man who's best for the part. Any group that has a 'name' policy destroys the value of finding new talent. We think the young people you see here will be the favorites of tomorrow."³⁶

Regional auditions were held at universities in several surrounding states after initial auditions, held in Fort Worth, to fill the positions in the resident singing and dancing ensemble were unsuccessful.³⁷ However, the principal roles in the opening musical Can-Can were announced in May.

Dick Smart and Deedy Irwin were not "name" stars, following Pollock's announced policy, but both were experienced performers in the round and well known in New York. The two

³⁴ Interview with Michael Pollock, stage director of Casa Mañana (1958-1965), Austin, Texas, July 14, 1980.

³⁵ Fort Worth Star-Telegram, June 11, 1958.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Fort Worth Press, March 14, 1958.

were said to be the first choice of producers at the thirty-nine in-the-round theatres in the United States doing musical comedies. Irwin had worked on Broadway in Pajama Game, Happy Hunting, and The Girl in Pink Tights. Smart had played the lead role in Bloomer Girl and had appeared in productions of Where's Charley, Gentlemen Prefer Blondes, Call Me Madam, and Wonderful Town, according to his biography.³⁸

Technical Problems Arise

In mid-June, with the dome now raised and work on the interior of the theatre still continuing, the new director Michael Pollock arrived to begin making plans for the first show. One of the first things he noticed, to his chagrin, upon touring the new facility was the level of the stage above the floor. In contrast, the stages of other theatres in-the-round are at floor-level while the audience seating is angled downward steeply, starting from the back row. The Casa Mañana seating was angled at only about one-third of what it should have been. After consultation with the architect, George King, it was discovered that work on the theatre plant had progressed too far to correct the error, short of re-digging the interior and re-paving the floor. Pollock began looking for alternative ways of staging scenes and blocking in movement which would compensate for the poor visual lines which the rake of the aisles and the height of the stage created.

³⁸Fort Worth Star-Telegram, May 25, 1958.

The main problem created by this mistake was that patrons sitting in the rows closest to the stage, where the best seating should be and where the action on the stage should be below eye-level, were blocked by even the smallest objects. To partially correct this problem, Pollock was forced in his blocking to have all but the main characters in a scene sit or lie down around the edge of the stage.³⁹

Another problem created by the angle of the seating was the scene changes, which from necessity took place in the aisles during blackouts or during brief scenes which could be done in the aisles. According to Pollock, aisle scenes were standard practice in musical theatres in-the-round, to cover the noise of such changes on the main stage. In *Casa Mañana*, however, aisle scenes were virtually impossible and scene changes were distracting. Part of the problem was solved by building small elevated platforms on which actors stood while doing aisle scenes. This was done because audience members sitting in the first rows had to strain to see over the top of the stage because of its elevation above the floor. Another solution to the problem was to rewrite the scenes so that what would customarily be an aisle scene (or played in front of the curtain on a proscenium stage) could be done onstage as a tag at the end of the previous scene. An extension was also built for the stage floor to

³⁹Interview with Pollock, July 14, 1980.

make it roomier. Originally the stage had been only twenty-eight feet at its widest, but with the discovery of the structural problems, this was extended to thirty-two feet.⁴⁰ Surrounding the stage was a two-foot-wide apron ten inches lower than the stage, which created a total acting area of thirty by thirty-four feet.⁴¹

The audience were not the only ones for which the height of the stage created problems. In a typical arena theatre the actor had only to walk down the steadily descending aisle until stage level was reached. At the end of each aisle in Casa Mañana the barrier of the elevated stage awaited. To compensate for this, ramps were constructed up which actors had to run, resulting in numerous mishaps.⁴²

At least part of the reason for the architectural and structural faults of the theatre can be attributed to a Fort Worth City ordinance. The ordinance, which applied to all city-owned buildings, and therefore to Casa Mañana, stated that aisles in an auditorium or amphitheatre could be no more than a certain degree of pitch.⁴³ This explained the aisles although it did not explain why the stage was placed above the eye-level of the audience.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Casa Mañana program for Can-Can, Fort Worth, Texas, 1958.

⁴²Interview with Pollock, July 14, 1980.

⁴³Interview with Dacus, September 23, 1980.

Since work on the interior of the new theatre had not been completed, rehearsals for the season opener were held in the old Pioneer Palace, left over from the 1936 Centennial Celebration.

The 1958 Season

Finally on July 5, 1958, Casa Mañana, the first permanent musical theatre in-the-round, opened with a black-tie premiere attended by many of Fort Worth's most prominent citizens. Also in the audience were such celebrities as Fess Parker, television's Davy Crockett, whose parents lived in Fort Worth, and Guy Madison, another popular television cowboy star. In addition, there were several chorus girls from Casa Mañana of 1936.⁴⁴ It had rained all day and the parking lot, which was unpaved, was turned into a sea of mud necessitating acts of bravery on the part of the patrons to even reach the front door of the theatre. Earlier in the day it had been discovered that the aluminum roof contained several leaks, leaving puddles of water all over the stage, but they were small and were patched before showtime.⁴⁵ Life magazine photographers were also there to record the historic event for posterity.⁴⁶

⁴⁴Fort Worth Star-Telegram, July 6, 1958.

⁴⁵Interview with Elston Brooks, amusements editor, Fort Worth Star-Telegram, Fort Worth, Texas, December 16, 1980.

⁴⁶"Stage Struck Texas," Life, XLV (December 22, 1958), 122.

Considering the necessity of pioneering in little-known territory due to the newness of the concept of musical theatre-in-the-round in a permanent setting, the premiere of Can-Can went remarkably well. Fort Worth critics were understandably optimistic although not effusive in their praise. Elston Brooks of the Fort Worth Star-Telegram said:

Fort Worth finally got the answer. . . . Casa Mañana does indeed sparkle inside with all the brilliance that has been bouncing off the aluminum dome this summer. To paraphrase Cole Porter's own song, "Can-Can" c'est magnifique-in la round [sic].⁴⁷

The Star-Telegram's venerable music critic, E. Clyde Whitlock, who had reviewed two Casa Mañanas, called the dancing and the choreography of Joann Mann "glamorous" and went on to add, ". . . Deedy Irwin is captivating in vivacity and personality."⁴⁸

The main star of the evening, though, was not the show or the actors, but the theatre. Jack Gordon of the Fort Worth Press said in an obvious reference to the theme of an earlier Casa Mañana, ". . . the night no longer is so young for some but the 'lady' is beautiful. She . . . is a handsome reincarnation of the original. . . ."⁴⁹

The Dallas critics were more tempered in their remarks. Most in general liked the new theatre but were

⁴⁷ Fort Worth Star-Telegram, July 6, 1958.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Fort Worth Press, July 6, 1958.

not so lavish in their praise of the show. Virgil Miers of the Dallas Times Herald called the playhouse "an ultra-modern temple of fun . . . dedicated to enlivening the summer months in its heavily populated area . . . a distinguished addition to the permanent Southwestern theatre scene." About the show itself Miers tended to be more conservative while still making allowances for the infant operation: ". . . considering the newness of the operation though, it was certainly a tolerable 'Can-Can' and sometimes a very bright one."⁵⁰

The critic for the Dallas Morning News, Rual Askew, was more severe in his criticism of the new theatre and of the production. His stinging review seemed to be strongly prejudiced against nearly every aspect of the operation, from the designing of a round theatre in the first place, to the choice of shows and the lack of "name" talent. Askew was especially bothered by the use of aisles for entrances and scene changes and went so far as to suggest digging up the floor of the theatre to create a subterranean dressing area under the stage.⁵¹ He further could not understand why a show such as Can-Can had been chosen for an inaugural premiere, noting that even with such name stars as Gwen Verdon and Lilo of the original cast, the play was, in his

⁵⁰Dallas Times Herald, July 6, 1958.

⁵¹Dallas Morning News, July 6, 1958.

words, "a breathtaking botch." The score was called "vapid" and the text "corny comedy." The musical direction under the baton of William Baer, who was assistant conductor of the Fort Worth Opera Association, was described as a "follow-me-or-else" style.⁵² The directing of Michael Pollock was also criticized, being described as "uninnovative and using no fresh ideas, only cliches." Finally after criticizing nearly every aspect of not only the theatre plant, but also the staff, the score, the script, the acting, and the directing, Askew noted, somehow humorously in light of his previous comments, that "with the improvements of experience, it [Casa Mañana] could breed the brand of theatre, musical or otherwise, that is a boost to good theatre anywhere."⁵³

Several of Askew's criticisms were probably valid, however, since they were noted by other critics as well. One criticism particular could not be ignored as unsound advice, especially in light of the newness of Casa Mañana's concept, which threw it constantly in the spotlight of public scrutiny. Askew warned,

Great care must be exercised in its [Casa Mañana's] choice of fare. . . for those with long experience can testify that quality alone can face up to the intimate scrutinies of the arena.⁵⁴

In this general area there were indeed several glaring problems to be corrected before the new theatre could finally

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Ibid.

overcome its detractors. Casa Mañana had several strong local offerings with which to compete, including the venerable Dallas Summer Musicals, long a source of pride in the admittedly more cultural atmosphere of Dallas, and Fort Worth's own 1936 Casa Mañana, which had achieved not only public favor but critical acclaim as well.

The staging and directing of the shows needed adjusting to compensate for the circular stage. Pollock, who had previously directed in mainly proscenium settings, was criticized for thinking proscenium, not arena. Pollock's tendency, noted by critics, to transpose the customs of grand opera to the arena stage were seen in his propensity for having his principals face the pit too much of the time, especially during musical numbers.⁵⁵ Casa Mañana's long-time musical director, Joseph Stecko, noted this tendency among many musical directors in the early years of musical arena theatre and agreed that as time went by new ways had to be found to compensate for the conductor's inability to see the actors at all times. Conductors had to learn to follow the entire demeanor of performers, including the movement of muscles in the back and gestures and to anticipate pacing and phrasing.⁵⁶

⁵⁵Ibid., July 22, 1958.

⁵⁶Interview with Joseph Stecko, music director of Casa Mañana Musicals, Fort Worth, Texas, June 18, 1980.

The one glaring, unexpected, unanticipated problem of the new Casa Mañana nearly caused it to be closed after the opening performance. When the theatre had opened there were no sound amplification devices of any kind. It was thought that the marvelous aluminum roof would act as a huge sounding board, making the acoustics of the theatre nearly perfect.⁵⁷ Whether there was any hint of trouble during rehearsals for the opening has not been determined, but it is very possible that problems of the magnitude encountered were indeed unexpected, since rehearsals had been going on in the old Pioneer Palace instead of the theatre proper. Further there were no prototypes for Casa Mañana, and as such, the theatre was a huge laboratory in which new lessons were constantly being learned and new trends established, as previously unbroken ground was turned.

Whatever the reasons, the domed roof behaved completely counter to what architects had expected. It was discovered that the high, arched ceiling had a tendency to absorb all sound when the actor's back was turned to a portion of the audience. Michael Pollock, the theatre's original director, blames this on a number of errors and miscalculations which were made while the theatre was still in the design stages, calling it "a major error in concept." He continued, "If you're not going to have a sound reinforcement system, then

⁵⁷Interview with Pollock, July 14, 1980.

you build the theatre with different materials--sound reflective surfaces rather than sound absorbent surfaces."⁵⁸

Pollock noted further concerning Casa Mañana's specific problem that

it isn't lack of volume that makes for difficulty in hearing in Casa Mañana. It's the lack of understanding because of the distortion. Sound bounces back and one can't understand what is being said. Further it is very difficult to amplify sound that is bouncing back and forth because it feeds right back into the speakers and a howl is produced.⁵⁹

The results of this distortion were painfully obvious on opening night. While the critics in general tried to be understanding of the theatre's newness and the genial atmosphere of the gala premiere kept the audience good-natured about the inconvenience, the occasion was more of a visual event than an auditory one.⁶⁰

Immediately after the first performance, staff members desperately sought emergency solutions to the problem. Luckily, since the premiere had occurred on Saturday and the actual opening of the theatre to the general public was not scheduled until Monday evening, there were nearly forty-eight hours in which to work. Things could have been worse, but not much.

By showtime Monday evening an emergency sound system had been installed, which consisted of five short microphones

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Interview with Brooks, June 26, 1980.

placed around the stage and one hung from overhead. This still was not adequate, and following the Tuesday performance the microphones were raised and four speakers were increased to eight.⁶¹

Meanwhile rehearsals were beginning for the second production of the season, Rodgers and Hammerstein's Carousel. It was publicized that the principals of the show, Frances Wyatt as Julie Jordan and Henry Michel in the role of Billy Bigelow, had auditioned for the two composers themselves before being allowed to contract for the parts.⁶² The show opened on July 21, to generally favorable but unecstatic reviews. The principals were commended for their vocal abilities, with one critic noting "there is bright clarity, sufficient shading and attentive phrasing to fill the ears with pleasant sound."⁶³ The characterizations, however, were once again criticized as being weak.

According to the report in one newspaper, the words of the critics were having a certain effect, for it was mentioned that there were plans to remove the circular stage at the end of the season and to use the auditorium floor level for the playing area, thus automatically raising the

⁶¹Fort Worth Press, July 7, 1958.

⁶²Fort Worth Star-Telegram, July 14, 1958.

⁶³Dallas Morning News, July 22, 1958.

angle of pitch for the seats and eliminating the need for ramps.⁶⁴ This, however, was never done.

Rual Askew, the theatre's most ardent critic, had softened somewhat, although very little. He did concede that management's attitude was one of eagerness to correct all technical problems quickly and that the staff were well aware of the plant's weaknesses and were not trying to gloss them over. He, however, went on to express the same sentiments later expressed by the theatre's first director, Michael Pollock, notably that many, if not all, of the basic problems could have been avoided if theatre experts had been consulted more thoroughly in every aspect of the theatre's design and construction.⁶⁵ He went on to include management of the theatre in his criticism, stating,

It is the lack of professional thinking by management that is denying any over-all distinction for the present. If Fort Worth will remain content with a play-thing, it has it in hand; if an operation of more regional importance is wanted, a lot of work needs to be done and undone. We happen to think the latter is obtainable--with a professional managing director installed.⁶⁶

With its third show of the season, Pajama Game, Casa Mañana finally seemed to be overcoming some of its initial unevenness of production. Michael Pollock, whose directing style had earlier been criticized, was finally said "to have

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶Ibid. Melvin Dacus at the time was listed as producer. The theatre had no managing director. See minutes, March 14, 1958.

come up with a few genuinely original twists, some elongated comic scenes to fit certain talents and an extra reprise," on audience-pleasing numbers.⁶⁷ Starring in the show were several actors who in later years were to become favorites of the local patrons, including Mace Barrett and Deedy Irwin in the principal roles, with Colee Worth and Irwin Charone providing comic relief.

The local critics loved the show, with Elston Brooks calling it a "smash."⁶⁸ Even the Dallas critics could find little fault in the production. Virgil Miers of the Times-Herald called the production ". . . a dandy version . . . spirited, humorous and sung with the kind of lustiness intended." The only dark spot in an otherwise bright show was the orchestra, which Miers described as "woefully incompetent."⁶⁹ Elston Brooks noted that "he [William Baer] is still the most reluctant man to give an encore we have ever come across."⁷⁰

The brightest moment of the season, as well as its darkest, occurred in the season's fourth offering, which ironically was booked into the theatre for only a week, a fact that management was later to regret. Franz Lehar's

⁶⁷Dallas Times-Herald, August 5, 1958.

⁶⁸Fort Worth Star-Telegram, August 5, 1958.

⁶⁹Dallas Times-Herald, August 5, 1958.

⁷⁰Fort Worth Star-Telegram, August 5, 1958.

venerable operetta The Merry Widow had been written in 1905. It was a standard of opera companies and musical tents, but Casa's management evidently considered it a questionable commodity for Fort Worth audiences. Its youthful star was, following Casa's policy, an unknown, although she was not to remain so in later years. Beverly Sills had appeared in Fort Worth previously in 1951 in the Opera Association's production of La Traviata. She had already done The Merry Widow six hundred times, including fourteen times in-the-round. Michael Pollock had previously directed her in the premiere of The Ballad of Baby Doe with the New York City Opera Company.⁷¹

The show was an unqualified and unexpected success. The Star-Telegram's music critic, E. Clyde Whitlock, took note of the caution of management with some chagrin, saying, "Casa Mañana opened its 'Merry Widow' engagement Monday night and the crowd indicated that the management need not have been timid regarding the reception of a better-class musical. . . ." ⁷²

As a sentimental allusion, Pollock had Prince Danilo sing "The Night Is Young and You're So Beautiful," the popular hit written for the original 1936 Casa Mañana, to the ladies of Maxim's. The magical highlight of the entire

⁷¹Fort Worth Star-Telegram, August 15, 1958.

⁷²Ibid., August 19, 1958.

season came, however, from a fortunate accident rather than from anything that could have been planned. During one performance there was a fierce thunderstorm, not unlike the one at the theatre's grand opening. As the second act began and Beverly Sills began singing the haunting "Vilia," all of the lights in the theatre, except for the ghostly light from the pit, went out, ironically creating the perfect mood and setting for the song. Instead of stopping, Sills continued the aria. The theatre became hushed as she turned slowly in the center of the stage, singing to an invisible audience. At the finale of the number, just as Sills reached the highest note, the lights on the stage slowly came back on, almost as if by plan. When the last strains of music had died away, the applause was thunderous and two additional encores were required.⁷³

On another occasion during the same show, director Pollock saw a cricket crawling on the hem of Sills' gown. Knowing that she was terrified of insects, he sent a dancer from the ensemble hurriedly onstage where he deftly whirled her around, bowed to her, grabbed the bug as he did so, and then calmly exited.⁷⁴ For the one-week engagement of the musical, Beverly Sills, who later became America's best-known

⁷³Interview with Dacus, September 23, 1980.

⁷⁴Fort Worth Star-Telegram, November 21, 1976.

opera star, commanding thousands of dollars an engagement, was paid approximately \$450.00.⁷⁵

The final show of the season was Call Me Madam, and with this show many of the problems earlier noted by critics seemed to return. The orchestra, under the direction of William Baer, once again was criticized as "the chief weakness of a fast-going operation."⁷⁶ Dallas Morning News writer Rual Askew further noted Michael Pollock's recurring problems adjusting his directing style to arena staging commenting, ". . . there are still too many immobile backs or obvious revolves."⁷⁷ About the show itself, the critics found little remarkable. It seemed plagued with the difficulty other shows in the season had experienced, a problem Rual Askew described as

not enough professional know-how in either the staging or musical departments to qualify as first-rate efforts. True management can point to its box office receipts and cry "success" but that deceptive condition doesn't guarantee top quality in musical production.⁷⁸

This last commentary would seem to be a fairly accurate reflection of the theatre's premiere season, as technical problems were weighed against artistic achievements. Monetarily, however, as Askew noted, the theatre was a

⁷⁵ Interview with Dacus, September 23, 1980.

⁷⁶ Dallas Times-Herald, August 26, 1958.

⁷⁷ Dallas Morning News, August 27, 1958.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

resounding success. Board president James Snowden reported that the total capital investment of the corporation was nearly \$160,000, of which only a little over \$100,000 had been raised through the sale of bonds. This difference had nearly been recovered, however, through the \$50,000 profit shown by the first season.⁷⁹ This achievement was drawing attention outside of the Fort Worth-Dallas area also. Eve Starr, writing in faraway Salem, Oregon, called Casa Mañana "a bold experiment in theatre construction."⁸⁰ This boldness was further applauded by the Shreveport (Louisiana) Times in an editorial by Pericles Alexander, who called Casa Mañana "a challenging and unique new musical venture."⁸¹ The editorial further took exception to the smug attitude of some Dallas critics, noting "while Dallas aisle-sitters have not been totally negative to what has been transpiring at Casa Mañana . . . the critics have looked askew at the daring Fort Worth enterprise, emphasizing all the obvious defects."⁸² The article further noted that it had taken the Dallas Summer Musicals seventeen seasons to evolve into its present successful operation and encouraged tolerance of the production ills and acoustical problems still to be

⁷⁹Minutes of the board of directors, Casa Mañana Musicals, Inc., Fort Worth, Texas, February 19, 1959.

⁸⁰Salem (Oregon) Statesman, July 24, 1958.

⁸¹Shreveport (Louisiana) Times, September 1, 1958.

⁸²Ibid.

solved. In his conclusion, Alexander went so far as to make a prediction: "No matter Dallas' attitude, Casa Mañana is destined to enjoy the last laugh. In time it is liable to become an admired institution."⁸³

⁸³Ibid.

CHAPTER III

THE THEATRE MATURES

Plans Are Made for a Winter Season

The 1958 season was a success at least monetarily if it did not always succeed artistically. New theatres are not expected to make money on the average until their third year, but Casa Mañana, in its premiere season in 1958, closed its doors with an average capacity of 84 percent.¹ Each show increased in sales, with Can-Can seating at a capacity of 70 percent, Carousel 78 percent, Pajama Game 91 percent, The Merry Widow an amazing 100 percent, and Call Me Madam 94 percent.² That same summer, the Dallas Summer Musicals, in its seventeenth year of operation, lost money. Casa Mañana of course had two advantages over the Dallas operation. One was the booking of largely unknown talent; the other was the fact that it did not have to face the huge overhead of building elaborate scenery.

Largely based on the financial success of that summer season, the board of directors began to consider trying a winter season, a move without precedent among musical theatres in-the-round and therefore a matter subject to

¹Fort Worth Star-Telegram, September 7, 1958.

²Ibid.

debate. Several amusement editors were invited to a meeting of the board at which the matter was to be discussed and greeted the proposal with mixed reactions. Jack Gordon, Fort Worth Press amusements editor, cautioned that he felt that it would be better to do an extended summer season with no other shows in the winter months except through the rental of the facility to outside individuals. One type of program considered, since Casa Mañana was still closely allied with the Fort Worth Opera Association through several of its founders and staff members, was a repertory season of operas suitable to Casa Mañana's intimate surroundings. Elston Brooks and James Snowden both felt, however, that a season entirely of musicals with no opera would have a better chance of success.³ The winter season finally announced by the board was Oklahoma! which would run in conjunction with the Southwestern Exposition and Fat Stock Show in February, Brigadoon, and Guys and Dolls. The reason for the choosing of the three shows was based on the strength of their previous popularity, which it was hoped would guarantee success to the winter season.⁴

Meanwhile Michael Pollock, who had returned to New York to direct several productions of the New York City Opera

³ Minutes of executive committee, Casa Mañana Musicals, Inc., Fort Worth, Texas, November 3, 1958.

⁴ Fort Worth Star-Telegram, December 26, 1958. Jo Swerling and Abe Burrows, Guys and Dolls, lyrics and music by Frank Loesser, 1950.

Company, announced some changes that were to be made in the operation of the theatre in recognition of some of the problems Casa had encountered in its first season. One of these changes included the bringing of a scenic designer to Fort Worth for all future productions. A New York artist, Hal Shafer, had done the first season's work from New York without ever visiting Fort Worth. The actual work had been done from Shafer's sketches by an assistant working with apprentices.⁵ Other improvements for the operation included the addition of a professional stage manager as well as a lighting technician and designer, which the theatre had also lacked in its first season. The need of the theatre to improve artistically if it wished to be respected in the theatre community was stated by Pollock: "This type of organization is the only way to achieve first-rate quality. There is no short-cut to quality nor is there any convenient packaged idea as a substitute."⁶

Perhaps as a result of the added staff, the winter season received generally favorable treatment at the hands of the critics, although Fort Worth critics by this time were showing a marked tendency to behave as more of a booster club, fearing perhaps that any severe criticism might damage the chances of the infant theatre's survival. Dallas critics

⁵Fort Worth Press, August 23, 1959.

⁶Fort Worth Star-Telegram, December 26, 1958.

took little notice of the three shows. Perhaps the entire season is best summed up by one critic's comment, "Not Casa's greatest, but pleasant enough. . . ." ⁷

Financially the results of the winter season were a good deal less than pleasant, and in March it was announced that future plans to continue a winter season of musicals was being discontinued due to the competition of such winter activities as ballet, opera, movies, and television. This competition resulted in the wasting of valuable properties which would bring in much higher profits in the summer. ⁸ A notation in the minutes of the board was far more succinct, however, calling it "the very unfortunate fall season." The expense of producing the winter season, added to the substantial losses of one show, resulted in a \$5,000 deficit. The minimal profits of the other two shows failed to justify a renewal of a winter season, or at least one in the musical genre. ⁹

At the same time losses from the winter season were being evaluated, shows for the second summer season were announced to the press. The 1959 season was slightly expanded to include six shows: Wonderful Town (the musical

⁷Fort Worth Press, February 11, 1959.

⁸Fort Worth Star-Telegram, March 7, 1959.

⁹Minutes of executive committee, Casa Mañana Musicals, Fort Worth, Texas, February 19, 1959.

version of My Sister Eileen), Silk Stockings, Where's Charley?, The King and I, The Student Prince, and Annie Get Your Gun.¹⁰ A new arrangement of job titles was also announced, with Michael Pollock becoming producer, as well as director, and Melvin Dacus, who had formerly been producer, becoming general manager and taking over public relations and promotion of ticket sales.¹¹ Physical changes in the theatre plant itself included the addition of a gray velour drape between the audience and the concourse to muffle the noise of a scene change, and a further refinement of the sound system.¹²

The 1959 Season

With the opening of the first show, Wonderful Town, some of the problems of the first season reasserted themselves. Rual Askew, the Dallas critic, termed the show "generally appealing," saying the cast could not be blamed for what he called "the theatre's basic inflexibility . . . forcing cue-lags while performers race up and down ramps."¹³

¹⁰ Joseph Fields and Jerome Chodoroy, Wonderful Town, lyrics by Betty Comden and Adolph Green, music by Leonard Bernstein, 1953; George S. Kaufmann, Abe Burrows, and Leveen McGrath, Silk Stockings, music and lyrics by Cole Porter, 1955; Dorothy Donnelly, The Student Prince, lyrics by Donnelly, music by Sigmund Romberg, 1924; George Abbott, Where's Charley, music and lyrics by Frank Loesser, 1948.

¹¹ Minutes of executive committee, March 30, 1959.

¹² Interview with Brooks, December 16, 1980.

¹³ Dallas Morning News, June 9, 1959.

Pollock's staging also was once again criticized for its lack of the flexibility necessary for arena theatre.¹⁴

The most conspicuous improvement of the second season, as noted by several critics, came in the form of Sherman Frank, the new musical director. Frank had come to Casa Mañana with extensive experience in both summer musical theatre and Broadway, something the previous director had lacked. Among his improvements was the removal of the electric organ from the pit and the addition of several more musicians to take its place.¹⁵

Despite these improvements, it seemed that Casa Mañana was destined to once again fall victim to endless arguments over the relative strengths of proscenium staging as opposed to some of the obvious limitations of theatre-in-the-round. In many cases it seemed more a matter of personal taste. The reviews of some critics by the second year were beginning to sound redundant if not actually ambiguous. One critic, while complimenting nearly every aspect of the season's fourth show, The King and I, including its acting, staging, and directing, still felt it necessary to say, "The fact remains, however, that the songs lose much of their force when the singers are forced to keep turning their backs on part of the audience."¹⁶

¹⁴Dallas Morning News, June 9, 1959.

¹⁵Fort Worth Press, May 28, 1959.

¹⁶Dallas Morning News, July 22, 1959.

In the early part of the season it seemed that the public might be listening to the theatre's critics and that Casa Mañana was not destined to repeat the success of the first season. Wonderful Town opened to a house barely half full, despite the strong personal appeal of its two stars, Betty O'Neill and Jacquelyn McKeever. The show did only fair business, as did the next two productions, Silk Stockings and Where's Charley? With The King and I, however, the season's fourth show, Casa Mañana broke all its own previous box office records, with the show averaging 92.7 percent of capacity and selling out the last seven performances entirely.¹⁷ One of the stars of the show, Christina Lind, as the English school teacher, Anna, was much made over in the press for her real-life role as daughter-in-law of Oscar Hammerstein II, one of the show's composers.¹⁸

Casa's fifth show of the 1959 season was an operetta, The Student Prince, which proved to be successful despite its age and a two-week run. The biggest success of the season, though, proved to be Irving Berlin's Annie Get Your Gun. Starring in the title role was Deedy Irwin, who had come to Fort Worth in 1958 to star in the theatre's premiere show, Can-Can. She had remained to marry the theatre's director Michael Pollock. Frank Butler was portrayed by

¹⁷Fort Worth Press, August 4, 1959.

¹⁸Fort Worth Star-Telegram, July 12, 1959.

George Wallace, and playing Buffalo Bill was Jack Rutherford, the son of Charles Rutherford, a prominent Broadway producer at the turn of the century. Rutherford was a veteran of show business whose credits included the Florenz Ziegfield production of "Whoopee," with Indian Cooper and Eddie Cantor. Also visiting rehearsals of the show was another show business veteran of a past era. Red Fox was the eighty-nine-year-old nephew of the great Sioux chief Crazy Horse and had first appeared in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show in 1889.¹⁹

While many shows did not translate well to theatre-in-the-round, this play within a play, which was filled with all the color and pageantry of the original turn of the century wild west show, seemed ideally suited to Casa Mañana's arena stage and Pollock took full advantage of the opportunity. Guns were fired and Indians in full ceremonial regalia performed their dances along the catwalks at the base of the lighting control panel, against the shimmering backdrop of the gold dome. The real highlight of the show came, however, when Deedy Irwin, in the title role, re-created one of Annie Oakley's most celebrated stunts by sharpshooting as she rode a motorcycle around the concourse of the theatre.²⁰ Critics were unanimous in their praise of the show, with one calling it "a glittering souvenir of turn-of-the-century show

¹⁹ Fort Worth Press, August 17, 1959.

²⁰ Dallas Morning News, August 19, 1959.

business."²¹ The show finished its run and Casa Mañana's second season on a high note, playing to 97.8 percent capacity and ending up ahead of the already remarkable King and I.²²

"In a generally bleak picture of summer musicals, Fort Worth is a bright star," announced the Fort Worth Star-Telegram, as Casa Mañana once again made money in only its second season of operation. The same report cited some of the factors of the theatre's early success, including what it called the "vigorous leadership" of Michael Pollock and his philosophy of employing competent performers whether or not their names were nationally known, calling it the "Star-of-Tomorrow System."²³ Although the season had gotten off to a slow start, it had built steadily, ending with two of its biggest successes. The Dallas Summer Musicals, on the other hand, had finished the season with a loss of \$30,000, and reports from other theatres around the country tended to be equally uninspiring. Part of this failure was attributed by the paper to the miscasting of several stars in parts unsuitable for them.²⁴

²¹Ibid.

²²Fort Worth Star-Telegram, September 1, 1959. (By an odd quirk The King and I made more money, however, because of the large number of half-price children's tickets sold for Annie Get Your Gun.)

²³Fort Worth Star-Telegram, September 1, 1959.

²⁴Ibid.

Following the close of the regular summer season no plans were made for another winter season, following the mediocre profits of the year before. Still there were many important things accomplished in between seasons. One of the most important was the reaching of an agreement between Casa Mañana Musicals and the Dallas Summer Musicals to mutually promote each other's seasons through joint advertising and publicity. It was thought that the success of one could be used to the benefit of the other and that more out-of-area visitors could be reached more effectively through a joint effort.²⁵

Plans Begin for the 1960 Season

Once again Casa Mañana got an early start on casting and by March had already announced many of the principals for the summer line-up of shows. Walter Cassel of the Metropolitan Opera was signed to appear as Emile de Becque in South Pacific along with another Met star, Ralph Herbert, who was cast as the lead in one of the season's operettas, Rosalinda (Die Fledermaus).²⁶ For the production of Lill Abner Pollock obtained the services of three of the original cast members who had gone on to re-create their roles in the

²⁵ Fort Worth Star-Telegram and Dallas Morning News, March 10, 1960.

²⁶ Johann Strauss, Die Fledermaus, 1874.

movie also. Joe E. Marks and Billie Hayes were cast as Mammy and Pappy Yokum and Ted Thurston as Senator Phogbound.²⁷

Following the weak start of the 1959 season, the theatre made a return to the glamour and hoopla of the 1958 premiere with the announcement that the opening show would be Jule Styne's Gentlemen Prefer Blondes.²⁸ The show was not generally conceded to be a great musical. It had been successful on Broadway mainly because of the presence of Carol Channing. Without the presence of Channing, however, the show was minimal at best. To compensate for this drawback, the staff decided to promote the show's assets, chiefly the idea that "Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend."²⁹

For the promotion, Harry Winston, a prominent New York jeweler, was contacted. Permission was gained to use five million dollars' worth of precious gems in the opening night performance. Winston personally escorted the jewels to Texas, noting that "probably every jewel thief in America would be in attendance at the performance."³⁰

Security for the jewelry was unprecedented. An armored car, escorted by two motorcycles and a police car, was

²⁷ Fort Worth Star-Telegram, March 6, 1960. Norman Panama and Melvin Frank, Li'l Abner, lyrics and music by Johnny Mercer and Gene de Paul, 1956.

²⁸ Anita Loos and Joseph Fields, Gentlemen Prefer Blondes, lyrics by Leo Robin, music by Jule Styne, 1949.

²⁹ Interview with Pollock, July 14, 1980.

³⁰ Ibid.

waiting at the airport to meet Winston and the jewels at midnight and to deliver the precious cargo to the vaults of the First National Bank in downtown Fort Worth. There was little secrecy involved in the transfer, however. Nervous policemen stood about as newspaper reporters and photographers asked questions and snapped pictures while the diamonds were safely packed away. For the dress rehearsal on Sunday night, the show's star Emmaline Henry wore fake jewels, but on Monday evening the escorted caravan delivered the real thing to the theatre. Two policemen were placed at the head of each of the ten aisles and five more officers were assigned to guard Emmaline Henry back stage, both before and after her big number.³¹

In another promotional gimmick for the same show, Pollock had brought in a group of statuesque chorus girls, supposedly from two of New York's top nightclubs, the Copa Cabana and the Latin Quarter. Waiting to meet them at the old Carter Field when their airplane touched down was a separate Rolls Royce for each girl, and driving each car was a handsome, eligible millionaire.³² The publicity release accompanying the girls' arrival said, "They are talented beauties not seen in this area since the days of

³¹Interview with Dacus, September 23, 1980.

³²Interview with Pollock, July 14, 1980.

the old Billy Rose Casa Mañana of the 1930's."³³ One Dallas columnist, evidently intrigued by all of this, inquired of the ladies what it was like to work in two of New York's top clubs, only to discover that none of the girls had ever appeared in either place.³⁴ At each performance of Gentlemen Prefer Blondes, the showgirls were to parade in skimpy costumes in a number added to the show especially for them and featuring the music from Gypsy, a current Broadway hit.³⁵ All of this was to be done with the approval and blessing of the composer of both shows, Jule Styne.³⁶

By 1960 Jule Styne had a string of Broadway hits to his credit, including Gentlemen Prefer Blondes, Gypsy, Peter Pan, High Button Shoes, and Bells Are Ringing, but the one thing he had never done was conduct his own music in performance.³⁷ Lured by an offer to conduct the overture of Gentlemen Prefer Blondes at its Casa Mañana premiere, Styne

³³Dallas Morning News, May 26, 1960.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Arthur Laurents, Gypsy, lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, music by Jule Styne, 1959.

³⁶Interview with Pollock, July 14, 1980.

³⁷James M. Barrie, Peter Pan, lyrics by Carolyn Leigh, Betty Comden, and Adolph Green, music by Mark Charlap and Jule Styne, 1954; Stephen Longstreet, High Button Shoes, lyrics by Sammy Cahn, music by Jule Styne, 1947; Betty Comden and Adolph Green, Bells Are Ringing, lyrics by Betty Comden and Adolph Green, music by Jule Styne, 1956.

agreed to come to Fort Worth and reportedly even began taking lessons with Leonard Bernstein.³⁸

Meanwhile as opening night drew closer, the neophyte conductor evidently was experiencing a case of stage fright and began insisting that he would perform only his original orchestration, which required thirty musicians. Unfortunately the Casa Mañana pit would accommodate only twenty musicians comfortably, so plans were laid by the theatre staff to keep Styne away from the orchestra at all costs, until his rehearsal. The mayor of Fort Worth was enlisted and declared Jule Styne Day in Fort Worth, and it was arranged that the governor would send a delegation to meet the composer at Love Field. From there Styne would be flown to Carter Field, where Miss Texas would meet him with another procession of dignitaries. From Carter Field he would then fly on by helicopter to the Western Hills Hotel, where the Sheriff's Posse would ride out to meet him. There he would be presented with a western hat and would be put on a horse. Finally he would be taken to play golf at Shady Oaks Country Club with golf pro Ben Hogan.³⁹ Whether the composer noticed a discrepancy in the number of musicians in the pit has not been ascertained, but later that evening, what must have been a thoroughly exhausted Jule Style conducted the

³⁸ Interview with Pollock, July 14, 1980.

³⁹ Ibid.

overture before a packed house of onlookers that included James Stewart, Randolph Scott, columnist Earl Wilson, and a star of the old Casa Mañana, Morton Downey.⁴⁰

The show, as planned, took a back seat on opening night to the diamonds, the showgirls, and opening-night parties. The scheduled parade of the showgirls occurred, but not without a hitch. Due to either the shortness of time or possibly a tiff between Styne and Pollock over revisions suggested during rehearsals, the music from Gypsy was not used after all.⁴¹ The Dallas Times Herald commented,

The production ran smoothly but never seemed to get off the ground. Emmaline Henry . . . was never a strong figure--unfortunately in a part that carries the whole show. . . . The production . . . was physically attractive. . . . Perhaps once the show is glued together Miss Henry will snap into a confidence and exude the strength needed to carry a show built around its star player.⁴²

Fort Worth columnist Jack Gordon later referred to the show as "Casa's poorest effort of the summer," but the glittering opening succeeded in what it had set out to do, giving Casa Mañana its strongest opening in three seasons and selling out several performances a show of not first-rate quality.⁴³

Following the premiere a gala party was held at Ridglea Country Club, where each of the showgirls appeared wearing

⁴⁰ Fort Worth Star-Telegram, June 1, 1960.

⁴¹ Dallas Times Herald, May 30, 1960.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Interview with Pollock, July 14, 1980.

one of the diamond trinkets. Nervous security guards refused to let the girls go anywhere unescorted, including the ladies' room, which eventually necessitated going in with them. All of this was reported in Earl Wilson's nationally syndicated column, a column in which he also glorified Casa Mañana as "the most splendiferous theatre-in-the-round in the country."⁴⁴

After such an opening many feared that Casa Mañana might find its own act difficult to follow. Once again, however, the season steadily built upon itself. Melvin Dacus, commenting on this at the close of the 1960 season, said, "It was figured that this season, our third, would be the critical one, would determine Casa Mañana's acceptance. It has turned out to be our best."⁴⁵

Kismet means fate, or destiny, and with that show, the second production of the 1960 season, Casa Mañana finally seemed to achieve what it was beginning to be feared was not destined for the theatre-in-the-round--artistic as well as popular acclaim.⁴⁶ According to Elston Brooks,

It must have been a kind fate that sent Casa Mañana the electric talents of Elaine Malbin, Mace Barrett and Charles Green all for the same show that surely is destined to be one of Casa's all-time greats. . . .

⁴⁴Fort Worth Press, June 6, 1960.

⁴⁵Ibid., September 4, 1960.

⁴⁶Charles Lederer and Luther Davis, Kismet, lyrics and music by George Forrest and Robert Wright, 1953.

It is everything that last week's "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" was not. . . . Kismet abounds with the beautiful and has more show stoppers than you can shake a baton at.⁴⁷

Elaine Malbin brought to Casa what, according to Brooks, had eluded the theatre in its first two seasons, something he called "star value."⁴⁸ Even though the show had been a failure at another summer theatre during the same season, the Pollock production achieved near-perfection in all aspects of production, an unusual commodity even in professional circles. Music, stars, orchestra, and dancers all seemed to jell and find universal approval among the critics.⁴⁹

Pollock seemed to prefer the lavishness of the overall production rather than depending too often on moments of theatrical electricity commonly known as "show stoppers." This tendency was noted by Denton Record-Chronicle fine arts writer, Bob Porter, who said, "Director Pollock moves his cast in a lively manner . . . letting the music and splendor

⁴⁷ Fort Worth Star-Telegram, June 14, 1960.

⁴⁸ Ibid., August 21, 1960.

⁴⁹ After leaving Casa Mañana in 1966, Michael Pollock announced the opening of a new theatre, Lamar Hunt's Bronco Playhouse in Dallas, Texas. He repeated many of his most successful shows while at the theatre, including Kismet. The productions, highly acclaimed for their artistry, were largely ignored by the local press. (Conversation with Dr. Stanley K. Hamilton, North Texas State University, Denton, Texas, February 5, 1981.)

speaking the message."⁵⁰ Pollock himself saw the various elements of a production as a way of heightening the idea of the playwright, one which, if used correctly, could exert force over the thinking of the audience:

As you work on technical production aspects, they all should be aimed in one direction so as to heighten the effect, the totality of what you are trying to say. Lights for example are not just to illuminate part of the stage, but can also provide emotional effect, and atmosphere. It can provide a time-out effect; it can put someone in isolation so that you hear his thoughts alone.⁵¹

Brought in especially for Casa's production of Kismet was guest choreographer Mara, a recognized expert in Asian and Oriental dance. Among her other credits, she had served as consultant to Jerome Robbins in the staging of dances for Broadway's The King and I.⁵²

Casa Mañana's third show of its 1960 season was Comden and Green's Bells Are Ringing, the story of the warm-hearted operator of a telephone answering service who becomes involved in the lives of her clients. Featured in the role created by Judy Holliday on Broadway was Pamela Britton. Britton herself had created the role of Meg in Brigadoon in 1947 on Broadway.⁵³

⁵⁰ Denton (Texas) Record-Chronicle, June 14, 1960.

⁵¹ Interview with Pollock, July 14, 1980.

⁵² Casa Mañana program, Kismet, 1960.

⁵³ Stanley Green, The World of Musical Comedy (New York, 1960), pp. 371-372.

With Rosalinda, the fourth offering of the season, Casa Mañana continued a tradition it had established in 1958 of presenting at least one operetta a season. Despite several early sell-outs, the appearance of Metropolitan Opera stars Ralph Herbert and Thomas Hayward, and the antics of comedian Jack Harrold, the show did the smallest business of the entire season. Part of the blame was placed on the Democratic National Convention, which was held the same week.⁵⁴

Pollock's technique to liven up arty operetta for relatively unsophisticated summer stock audiences was to inject as many comic bits of business into a show as possible. Rosalinda, as described by Elston Brooks, was typical:

. . . for three acts . . . a full house did laugh at Metropolitan Opera stars walking through rubberized bars, calling each other Elvis and making cracks about the Skyliner (a popular Fort Worth club). When a character requested a chair, one was pulled up from the orchestra pit by a rope. Hats hung from invisible pegs and whisky bottles fell from the overhead teaser into hands.⁵⁵

All of this caused the Star-Telegram's dignified music critic E. Clyde Whitlock to concede his enjoyment while still maintaining the shreds of his artistic restraint: "It is admitted that the work has been stirred up into a 'show' to the ultimate disadvantage of the music, but the accessions add a fillip of surprise not too remote from the spirit of the original."⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Fort Worth Star-Telegram, July 12, 1960.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

One of the high points of Casa Mañana's third season was Jack Harrold, who had become more or less the resident comedian of the theatre, featured in every show of that season. His appearance on stage in Cole Porter's Kiss Me Kate, the theatre's fifth production, elicited spontaneous applause from the audience. His constant mugging and ad-libbing led, however, to complaints from the show's principals of scene stealing. After being reprimanded by director Pollock, Harrold temperamentally quit the show, which was only midway through its run. All of this came to light when Harrold placed a disgruntled phone call to Star-Telegram critic Elston Brooks to air his grievances. After causing considerable consternation among the theatre's staff, Harrold abruptly returned to the cast the next day still denying that he had done anything amiss and evidently pleased with the commotion he had caused.⁵⁷

The sixth show of the season was Li'l Abner and featured a cast of seventy members, the largest to be seen on the Casa Mañana stage, in addition to a donkey, a pig, a goose, and two hounds. The show had unprecedented sell-outs of every performance, breaking the previous record for sell-outs held by The King and I. Jack Gordon described the play as "a howling hit . . . a show delivered with

⁵⁷Interview with Brooks, June 26, 1980.

astonishing energy by the largest cast assembled in Casa Mañana's three summers."⁵⁸ Two extra performances were required to accommodate ticket buyers, boosting the show's profits even more.

Ironically, as Casa Mañana opened a three-week run of South Pacific as the last show of the 1960 season, Oscar Hammerstein II died in Pennsylvania. For the show Pollock wanted to involve the audience more fully in the final embarkation scene, as all the soldiers, sailors, and marines who had been so frustrated in the early part of the Pacific campaign finally were preparing to make a real contribution to the war effort. The script called for a few token cast members to go offstage singing "Honeybun," supposedly to board the transports taking them into battle. Instead, Pollock enlisted the services of a full platoon of Marines in full fighting gear, including bazookas and flamethrowers, well over one hundred people, who came marching across the stage singing "A hundred and one pounds of fun, that's my little honey bun." The results were, according to Pollock, "better than Broadway." When Richard Rodgers heard about the production number, he was so impressed that he sent a personal representative to view the presentation.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Fort Worth Press, August 7, 1960.

⁵⁹ Interview with Pollock, July 14, 1980.

During Casa Mañana's first three seasons it had achieved an amazing level of success for a new theatre at a time when other theatres, older and more established, had been losing substantial amounts of money. Not only had Casa Mañana made money but it had been able to expand its season from five shows the first year to seven in 1960. All of this was accomplished despite the physical limitations of the building, a woefully inadequate sound system, and the fact that no one had ever done anything similar before on a permanent basis. At least part of this success can surely be attributed to the novelty of the operation, but audience response in the first three seasons clearly indicated that a permanent theatre-in-the-round was indeed a viable idea.

The Second Winter Season and Creation of an Academy

Once again, at the close of the 1960 summer season, the board of directors was encouraged enough by Casa Mañana's success to embark on a second attempt at a winter season. This time, however, on the advice of Michael Pollock and others, it was decided not to waste any more musical properties which could be done more profitably in the summer months but to go instead with a short season of legitimate plays. These, Pollock explained, were far less expensive to produce and even with a name star could still show a

profit. It was decided to produce three or four plays, using name stars who would have strong audience appeal.⁶⁰

In a further attempt to find ways to utilize the facility year-round and to help pay operating expenses, plans were announced by the board to open an academy for performing arts and to produce one or more children's shows during the winter on successive weekends. Newspapers reported the academy would offer workshops in acting, musical comedy, opera, and technical aspects of production. It was promised that those who successfully completed courses would be given the opportunity of auditioning for leading theatrical agents from New York and Hollywood and would have the opportunity of performing in future Casa productions.⁶¹

The 1960 winter season opened with Clare Booth Luce's biting satire, The Women, and brought to the Casa Mañana stage the talents of Lorraine Day, who had gained popularity as the girlfriend of Doctor Kildare in several movies.⁶² Also featured in the cast were Marguerite Chapman and Sherree North. The play got off to a slow start, and at first it was feared that there existed too much fall competition for a successful run, but as word-of-mouth spread about the high

⁶⁰Minutes of the Board of Directors, Casa Mañana Musicals, Inc., Fort Worth, Texas, September 2, 1960.

⁶¹Fort Worth Press, August 21, 1960.

⁶²Clare Boothe Luce, The Women, 1936.

quality of the production, there were fewer empty seats. Although it never played to completely full houses, the show still managed to break even because of the low production costs.⁶³

The second play of the winter season brought several more outstanding Hollywood veterans to the Casa Mañana stage in the Pulitzer-Prize winning comedy-drama, Mister Roberts.⁶⁴ Ralph Meeker was featured in the title role, with Eddie Bracken and Frank McHugh in the supporting roles of Ensign Pulver and Doc. Tom Ahearne was cast as the hated captain of the Navy cargo ship, Reluctant. The play made a profit despite some criticism of its realistic portrayal of the language of sailors. This would have seemed ironic anyway, but it became even more so in light of the play's theme, devotion to ideals.⁶⁵

Following the fall season's success, it was decided to go ahead with plans for another set of plays to be done in the spring of 1961, but, still experimenting, Casa officials decided to limit each play to one name star and to cut running times from two weeks to one.⁶⁶ The spring season opened in mid-April with The Solid Gold Cadillac,

⁶³Dallas Morning News, November 23, 1960.

⁶⁴Thomas Heggen and Joshua Logan, Mister Roberts, 1948.

⁶⁵Fort Worth Star-Telegram, December 6, 1960.

⁶⁶Ibid., December 21, 1960.

starring Martha Raye.⁶⁷ The show immediately sold out and Casa officials quickly regretted that the show had been booked for only four performances. The second show, Operation Madball, starred Sal Mineo but did disappointing business.⁶⁸ The final two shows of the short season, Make a Million, starring Jack Carson, and The Marriage-Go-Round, starring Constance Bennett and Hugh Marlow, both made money.⁶⁹

The 1961 Summer Season

Once again in 1961, as the fourth summer season prepared to open, Fort Worth and Dallas musical officials got together to announce the continuation of a cooperation pact reached the year before which included making tickets of both theatres available in each other's lobbies.⁷⁰ The season also featured Casa Mañana's first repeat of a musical, Pajama Game, which had been the third show of the premiere season in 1958. To balance this, Casa Mañana, in its continuing efforts to become known as an innovative operation, planned to open the season with a try-out for an untried,

⁶⁷ Howard Teichmann and George S. Kaufman, The Solid Gold Cadillac, 1953.

⁶⁸ Arthur P. Carter, Operation Madball, 1960.

⁶⁹ Norman Barasch and Carroll Moore, Make a Million, 1958; Leslie Stevens, The Marriage-Go-Round, 1959.

⁷⁰ Dallas Morning News, June 18, 1961.

Broadway-bound musical, Calamity Jane.⁷¹ The event was even more significant for the fact that this was the first time a musical had been given a Broadway try-out outside the East or had been given a try-out in-the-round. It was announced that the show would run for three weeks instead of the usual two.⁷²

Another outstanding feature of the 1961 season was the addition of several members to the artistic staff. In 1961 Casa Mañana upgraded the quality of its costumes and discontinued the practice of renting them from New York or Hollywood when it engaged Evelyn Norton Anderson to design costumes exclusively for the theatre's productions, beginning with the premiere of Calamity Jane.⁷³ Her costumes were so authentic that Casa began renting them to other theatres; and several years later, after Anderson had become recognized as one of the top costume designers in the country, her entire collection was purchased from Casa Mañana by Arizona State University.⁷⁴

Hired as lighting designer was Jules Fisher, who was also a talented inventor. For The Wizard of Oz he created

⁷¹Charles K. Freeman, Calamity Jane, music by Sammy Fain, lyrics by Paul Francis Webster, 1960.

⁷²Fort Worth Star-Telegram, November 15, 1960.

⁷³Fort Worth Press, July 24, 1961.

⁷⁴Interview with Pollock, July 14, 1980.

an innovative dome projector which could project several colors at once, producing a rainbow effect.⁷⁵ The next year, when the theatre was doing Peter Pan, the staff grappled with the problem of Tinkerbelle, an effect that in a proscenium theatre was ordinarily produced by a manually operated spotlight. In Casa Mañana's arena setting, however, the effect was impossible. To solve the problem, Fisher simply invented a remote-control follow-spot, which could pivot and dive in any direction. There was no other instrument like it in the world at the time and the copyright was later sold to Century Lighting Company.⁷⁶ Fisher went on to win wide acclaim as a lighting designer, who was responsible for such shows as Lenny, Jesus Christ, Superstar, Mourning Becomes Electra, and Pippin, and to form his own highly successful theatrical lighting firm.⁷⁷

A third outstanding member of the staff was the choreographer, Ellen Ray. Ray was a dancer-singer-actress who had served as assistant to such dancers as Fred Astaire, Gene Kelly, Michael Kidd, and Roland Petit, along with performing in many films, including Take Me Out to the Ball Game,

⁷⁵Frank Gabrielson, The Wizard of Oz, music and lyrics by Harold Arlen and E. Y. Harburg.

⁷⁶Interview with Pollock, July 14, 1980.

⁷⁷Jules Fisher, "Shadows in the Light," Theatre Crafts, VIII (February, 1974), 31.

The Pirate, Daddy Long Legs, and the Broadway production of Bells Are Ringing.⁷⁸

Casa Mañana's gamble in 1961 to produce an untried musical proved to be a disappointment; yet as an attempt to provide a proving ground for potential Broadway material it was significant nonetheless. Calamity Jane was different from most musicals in that it had originally been produced as a movie in 1953 with Doris Day and Howard Keel. What made good movie material, however, did not necessarily translate well into play form. The show had several good tunes, including the hit "Secret Love," but it was criticized for its musical lopsidedness, with most of the music appearing in the first act. Bob Porter of the Denton Record-Chronicle complained that there was so much music that the characters had no identities. He continued, saying, "Neither is the humor sharp enough, nor the construction of the show clean-cut. When it should rise to a climax it often merely totters on the brink. . . . The characters are colorful legend, if as yet the legend is not fully realized."⁷⁹

Since Calamity Jane was a Broadway try-out, even Variety took notice of the event with much the same observations as local critics, stating that "while Fort Worth may

⁷⁸Fort Worth Star-Telegram, June 11, 1961.

⁷⁹Denton Record-Chronicle, June 2, 1961.

be ready for Broadway, Calamity Jane is not." The show's painfully obvious shortcomings did not, however, extend to Mike Pollock's staging, with Variety calling it the "slickest aspect of this . . . in its keen sense of spectacle in terms of arena staging."⁸⁰ One of the show's few bright spots was its technical excellence. In one scene a full-sized stage-coach created by Jules Fisher and Norman Perrill and powered by an electric motor circled the concourse on an unseen track as strobe lights blinked to heighten the old-time-movie effect.⁸¹

The production of Calamity Jane was further hurt by the eleventh-hour illness of the show's star, Deedy Irwin, with pneumonia. Her replacement, Betty O'Neill, had only ten days in which to learn the part. Both Calamity Jane and The Pajama Game, Casa's next production, lost money at the box office. The Pajama Game had been revived chiefly because of its popularity in 1958, but it was inferior to the first production and suffered by comparison as a result.⁸²

The biggest surprise of the season was The Wizard of Oz. Generally conceded to be a children's show, it was one of the hits of 1961 and included in its cast Margaret Hamilton, re-creating her 1939 movie role as the Wicked Witch of the

⁸⁰Variety, May 29, 1961.

⁸¹Fort Worth Press, June 14, 1961.

⁸²Ibid., September 12, 1961.

West. Besides Jules Fisher's special effects which included a realistic-looking cyclone, a standout of the show was Ellen Ray's choreography. According to the Star-Telegram, "leaf-shrouded dancers appeared to peel away from forest trees . . . , witch's jack-o-lanterns lose their heads and luminous skeletons play one another's backs like xylophones."⁸³

Another landmark for Casa Mañana was noted in the Dallas Morning News with the opening of the season's fourth production: "Casa Mañana has built a reputation for trying anything on the theatre's arena stage and is currently adding to that with the first production of The Music Man other than the Broadway and National Touring Company presentations."⁸⁴ Portraying glib con-man Professor Harold Hill was Mace Barrett, a local-audience favorite who had starred in several previous Casa productions.

The show presented a difficult challenge in the round and did not always succeed entirely. One critic noted that "The Music Man turning round almost comes out 'square,'" but what was referred to as Michael Pollock's "audacity in even attempting this musical" was credited for the show's success.⁸⁵ This "audacity" was reflected particularly in

⁸³Fort Worth Star-Telegram, July 5, 1961.

⁸⁴Dallas Morning News, July 18, 1961. Meredith Willson, The Music Man, 1957.

⁸⁵Dallas Morning News, July 19, 1961.

the staging of two numbers: the opening railroad car scene and the celebrated "Marian the Librarian," which were thought to be nearly impossible to stage except in proscenium. For the two numbers Pollock's staff created a railroad car and library shelves which appeared to be solid, but when lit, became transparent.⁸⁶ The show with its big number, "Seventy-six Trombones," and its infectious, corny good humor was one of the two big hits of the season.

The fifth show of the season, Texas Li'l Darlin', can probably be noted briefly for the appearance of Don Wilson, Jack Benny's famous announcer and side-kick.⁸⁷ The production played to the smallest crowds in the theatre's short history. Ironically, it appeared back to back with the theatre's biggest hit, Show Boat.⁸⁸ The 1927 operetta sold out every one of its fourteen performances, forcing the cancellation of one week of the season's final show so that it could be held over for another week. The third week was also a complete sell-out. Called "a truly memorable milestone in the theatre's history," Show Boat, according to the Star-Telegram, demonstrated "what can happen when unforgettable music is combined with the right talent." That talent

⁸⁶ Interview with Pollock, July 14, 1980.

⁸⁷ John Whedon and Sam Moore, Texas Li'l Darlin', lyrics by Johnny Mercer, music by Emmett Dolan, 1950.

⁸⁸ Oscar Hammerstein II, Show Boat, music by Jerome Kern, 1927.

included Nolan Van Way as Gaylord Ravenal and Judith McCauley as Magnolia and marked the first appearance on the Casa Mañana stage of a black performer. Leonard Hayward sang the stirring "Ol' Man River" and promptly stole the show.⁸⁹

The 1961 season finally ended with a one-week run of Saludos de Mexico, an imported show of Mexican national folk dancing and music. Although the season as a whole still showed a profit for the fourth year in a row, due mainly to the hold-over of Show Boat, the season gross was down 5 percent from 1960.⁹⁰

The fall and spring of 1961-62 saw the end of Casa Mañana's attempts to produce an off-season series of musicals or legitimate plays other than children's show. The Casa Omnibus Series, as its name implied, contained a little bit of everything, including Mexico's National Ballet, a short opera, and a children's presentation. The highlight of the series, however, was Father of the Bride, which featured Joe E. Brown.⁹¹ During rehearsals for Father of the Bride, Joe E. Brown, who refused to be guided off-stage during blackouts, fell off the stage into the orchestra pit. Brown, a former circus performer, came away from the incident

⁸⁹ Fort Worth Star-Telegram, August 15, 1961.

⁹⁰ Ibid., September 15, 1961.

⁹¹ Caroline Francke, Father of the Bride, 1951.

unhurt, however, by grabbing a railing, neatly doing a complete spin over the bar, and landing on his feet in the pit. He was sixty-nine at the time.⁹²

⁹²Fort Worth Star-Telegram, July 9, 1973.

CHAPTER IV

1962-1963: THE THEATRE'S REPUTATION GROWS

The 1962 Season

In the spring of 1962, it seemed that Casa Mañana's financial luck was about to run out, when the theatre was unexpectedly hit with a \$40,000 tax bill based on the definition of an obscure 1936 law which said a 10 percent admission tax based on anticipated earnings had to be charged on certain ticket sales in the state. Representatives of the theatre protested, claiming that the law was never meant to include tax-exempt non-profit organizations such as Casa Mañana, since all its earnings were plowed back into productions.¹ Meanwhile, the Dallas Grand Opera Association, which had also been hit with the tax, paid under protest and filed suit for its return. As Casa Mañana awaited a ruling on the Dallas suit, its fifth season opened with The Desert Song, Casa's sixth production of an operetta.²

With one exception (Rosalinda, 1960), the operetta segment of Casa's first five years proved to be very

¹Fort Worth Star-Telegram, May 23, 1962.

²Otto Harbach, Oscar Hammerstein II, and Frank Mandel, The Desert Song, music by Sigmund Romberg, lyrics by Harbach and Hammerstein, 1926.

successful, while another operetta, Showboat, headed the list as Casa Mañana's most popular and most profitable show.³ Once again one of the highlights of The Desert Song was the staging of director Michael Pollock. In an attempt to envelop the audience in the romantic atmosphere of the play, Pollock used the theatre to its full potential. As the lights went down for the haunting overture, scrims, completely rounding the concourse of the theatre, began to twinkle with golden stars, and the desert in all its timeless mystery and allure was revealed.⁴

Starring in the operetta as the Red Shadow was Nolan Van Way and cast opposite him was Linda Loftis, a Fort Worth singer who became Miss Texas and later was a runner-up for Miss America. Despite its artistic beauty, the production proved literally to be the downfall of its leading man. On opening night, as Van Way made a key entrance up one of the theatre's treacherous ramps, he accidentally tripped over a stage bracket, spun into the air, and crashed onto the stage. The horrified audience gasped, but then sighed with relief as Van Way picked himself up unhurt. The very next line in the scene, spoken by actor Michael Waco, was "You took a chance coming here tonight." In a later dueling scene, in which the Red Shadow was supposed to neatly

³Fort Worth Star-Telegram, June 4, 1962.

⁴Interview with Pollock, July 14, 1980.

outmaneuver his opponent, Van Way drew his sword, only to discover that all he held in his hand was the hilt. He had evidently broken the sword in his earlier tumble.⁵

The production of The Desert Song was further distinguished by the casting of silent movie idol, Ramon Novarro. During the 1920s and 1930s Novarro had been touted as the romantic successor to Rudolph Valentino.⁶

The next two shows of the season, Peter Pan and Bye Bye Birdie, helped to boost Casa Mañana to its best attendance figures for the early part of a season since its opening in 1958. Peter Pan presented a unique challenge for the theatre's staff since Peter's flying apparatus had been engineered for proscenium theatre. Brought in to solve the problem was Terry Shepherd, the same man who had "flown" Mary Martin in the Broadway production. In order to accommodate the flight crew, forty-six seats had to remain empty and the circular light teaser had to be hoisted thirty-five feet above the stage.⁷

In late July Casa Mañana finally received the ruling it had anxiously awaited for nearly two months. State Comptroller Robert S. Calvert notified Casa president James Snowden that the theatre would not have to pay taxes on its

⁵ Interview with Brooks, June 26, 1980.

⁶ Fort Worth Press, November 5, 1968.

⁷ Fort Worth Star-Telegram, June 25, 1962. Michael Stewart, Bye Bye Birdie, lyrics by Lee Adams, music by Charles Strouse, 1960.

1962 season. He further indicated that as long as Casa maintained its non-profit status, it could operate tax free as it had in the past.⁸ This mitigated the economic problem of having both the next two shows, Fanny and High Button Shoes, lose money.⁹

With Damn Yankees, however, Mike Pollock's philosophy of involving the audience as much as possible once again brought the theatre national attention of a sort.¹⁰ For the second act, which was set in Yankee Stadium, the audience each night was issued seat cushions and prop beer bottles. Jules Fisher had mounted batteries of lights around the dome to complete the atmosphere of a real ballpark, and to add to the effect, Pollock had found a Mickey Mantle look-alike from Poolville, Texas. As the lights banged on and the announcer's voice introduced Mantle, the crowd was encouraged to pelt the umpire or Mantle (depending on their motivation) with the bottles and cushions. The incident was picked up first by Life magazine and then by NBC-TV's nightly news.¹¹

⁸Ibid., July 27, 1962.

⁹S. N. Behrman and Joshua Logan, Fanny, music and lyrics by Harold Rome, 1954.

¹⁰George Abbott and Douglass Wallop, Damn Yankees, music and lyrics by Richard Adler and Jerry Ross, 1955.

¹¹Interview with Pollock, July 14, 1980. Reportedly the composition beer bottles were manufactured clandestinely by a Casa Mañana supporter who had access to a local company's machinery and equipment.

The season once again ended on a high note with the final production, Flower Drum Song. This show ran for three weeks and was one of the season's biggest hits with its whimsical plot of a Chinese mail-order bride caught in the middle of a war of the generations.¹²

In September, 1961, when the Southwest Theatre Conference had held its fourteenth annual meeting in Fort Worth, the former Dallas Morning News theatre critic, Pericles Alexander, had called Casa Mañana "the most important summer stock development in America."¹³ Indeed several theatres patterned after Casa Mañana had gone up around the country, and Michael Pollock, along with several of his staff, were eventually offered consulting posts at some of these theatres.¹⁴

In its first five years Casa Mañana had many achievements to its credit. It had boldly experimented with formats, seasons, and staging and design techniques, at a time when there was no other similar theatre to draw upon for guidance. Some of its premieres were called "gaudy" and Michael Pollock's staging took criticism as "audacious" and "gimmicky" rather than serious theatre; yet at its best, it was innovative and gave Casa Mañana the impetus

¹²Joseph Fields and Oscar Hammerstein II, Flower Drum Song, lyrics by Hammerstein, music by Richard Rodgers, 1958.

¹³Shreveport (Louisiana) Times, October 22, 1961.

¹⁴Fort Worth Star-Telegram, April 11, 1965.

it needed to survive. Not only that, but the theatre had set precedents of its own through the experimentation of a top-notch technical and artistic staff. Further, and not to be discounted, it had overcome major flaws in the building's design to make money, without the benefit of "name" entertainers.

1963 Finally Brings Artistic Respect

In 1963 Casa Mañana was known throughout the nation as one of very few summer stock theatres that had made a profit since its opening. Although the theatre had not paid back its original debt, it had still averaged a profit for its first five seasons of \$2,900.¹⁵ With such a small margin of profit, Casa, like most theatres, had little room for error; therefore, it was inevitable that a financial crisis should eventually arise. In February of 1963 exactly that crisis occurred, marking the beginning of a period of change that was to mature the young organization.

Melvin Dacus later characterized the first five years of Casa Mañana's existence as "struggle, struggle, struggle."¹⁶ In 1958, when the theatre had been built with \$500,000 in bonds authorized by the voters, cost overruns had forced up the final price tag an additional \$207,744,

¹⁵Fort Worth Press, February 8, 1963.

¹⁶Interview with Dacus, September 23, 1980.

which had been financed through the borrowing of \$210,000. In 1963 this loan was due, and with only minimal profits to show for its first five seasons, \$196,500 was still owed by the corporation.¹⁷

To pay off the loan, an underwriting campaign was instituted which, it was hoped, would raise \$60,000 the first year and completely retire the loans within four years. The goal was to obtain 1,200 shares of underwriting. Each share would amount to a pledge to bear a proportionate part of any deficit up to a maximum of \$50 per share per year for four years. Michael Pollock, who had been accustomed to casting his plays earlier than most theatres, was forced to wait until it was seen whether the campaign would be successful.¹⁸ It was not until six weeks later that final approval for the season was given. Although at first only \$50,000 of the needed \$60,000 had been raised, by May Casa had exceeded its announced goal by nearly \$2,000.¹⁹

Up until the 1963 season, critics had frequently complained that Michael Pollock did not allow shows to speak for themselves, depending rather on what the critics called "gimmicks." One critic put it succinctly when he said, "The stagings have been treated too informally, with the cast

¹⁷ Fort Worth Star-Telegram, February 3, 1963.

¹⁸ Ibid., February 10, 1963.

¹⁹ Ibid., May 3, 1963.

throwing asides at the spectators and improvising at will, giving the shows more of a variety feeling than legitimate theatre."²⁰ The fact that these gimmicks were beginning to wear thin in their purpose was noted by Elston Brooks in mid-season, after Casa Mañana had opened Wildcat, its most disastrous failure to date: "The tendency to gimmick up Broadway shows usually strikes a bad note with audiences in the so-called 'sticks.' The truth of the matter is that there aren't any 'sticks' anymore, and people . . . are show-wise enough to know they are being gimmicked."²¹

With the one exception of Wildcat, the 1963 season appeared on the whole to usher in a new Casa Mañana which took a more serious attitude toward itself, a change that was reflected in the music and stagings of several of its productions. The season saw the premieres of several then-new Broadway musicals, including Gypsy and West Side Story, and the outstanding stagings these shows received did much to change the attitudes of the critics.²²

Virgil Miers, critic for the Dallas Times Herald, who had largely discounted Casa Mañana in its first five years,

²⁰Dallas Times Herald, March 19, 1961.

²¹Fort Worth Star-Telegram, July 14, 1963. N. Richard Nash, Wildcat, lyrics by Carolyn Leigh, music by Cy Coleman, 1960.

²²Arthur Laurents, Gypsy, lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, music by Jule Styne, 1959.

noted this change in attitude in his review of Gypsy:

No guarantee can be made that the Casa Mañana Musicals has banned forever its old practices of endless adlibbing, shameless eye-rolling, clowning and use of carnival gimmicks on and off the stage. But in its new show . . . there is disciplined theatre. And with it, the . . . theatre has a stage musical to respect and like.

While still critical of some aspects of the production, Miers went on to call Gypsy "one of the most robust and professional entertainments yet assembled by . . . Casa Mañana" and concluded by saying "Gypsy is responsible theatre that puts a pair of becoming long pants on the . . . operation."²³

West Side Story, set in the strong position at the end of the season and scheduled for a three-week run, opened to the wildest acclaim yet accorded a show in Casa Mañana's six-year history. Elston Brooks flatly called it "the best thing . . . Michael Pollock and choreographer Ellen Ray have ever done."²⁴ For the show, which was heavily weighted toward dance, the stage was extended to cover the apron, which caused viewing problems in some scenes for patrons. Once again Virgil Miers of the Dallas Times Herald mentioned "a more polished, mature approach to show making than had been perhaps the general rule." He went on to say that with West Side Story Pollock had overcome what Miers called "the irritating elements in a production that conspicuously

²³Dallas Times Herald, June 19, 1963.

²⁴Fort Worth Star-Telegram, September 3, 1963.

moved to now this quarter of an audience, now that quarter.

. . ."²⁵

1963 was the first time Casa Mañana had attempted a season as long as eight shows. Included in that number were an unprecedented three operettas: Song of Norway, Vagabond King, and The Merry Widow.²⁶ The three had been booked largely on the basis of the success of The Desert Song the year before, but the three proved to be the season's lowest grossing shows, surpassed only by Wildcat. The other two shows of the season, Cinderella and Carnival, did only fair business.²⁷ The season was saved from substantial losses only by West Side Story's immense success, accounting for nearly one-fourth of the season's gross profits. Despite this, however, there was still a drop of \$3,000 from 1962's profits.²⁸

²⁵Dallas Times Herald, September 8, 1963.

²⁶Milton Lazarus, The Song of Norway, lyrics and musical adaptation by Robert Wright and George Forrest, 1944; Brian Hooker and W. H. Post, The Vagabond King, music by Rudolf Friml, 1925;

²⁷Oscar Hammerstein, Cinderella, music by Richard Rodgers, lyrics by Hammerstein, 1962; Michael Stewart, Carnival, lyrics and music by Bob Merrill, 1961.

²⁸Fort Worth Star-Telegram, September 22, 1963.

CHAPTER V

1964-1966: A TURNING POINT

1964: A Record Season

On March 26, 1964, another blow fell that was to force other far-reaching changes at Casa Mañana and was to present the theatre with an unexpected financial burden which nearly caused its closing. On that date, James Snowden, who had been Casa Mañana's first and only president, put a gun to his head and committed suicide. Snowden, described by associates as a modest, shy, almost self-effacing man, had a great feel for the arts, having been chiefly instrumental in building the Fort Worth Opera Association. As Casa Mañana's founder and mentor, he had personally signed notes for over \$180,000 guaranteeing loans made to Casa Mañana.¹

At mid-morning, Star-Telegram's amusements editor, Elston Brooks, phoned the theatre to get reactions to Snowden's death and stunned a disbelieving staff, including general manager Melvin Dacus and director Michael Pollock. Somehow, in the confusion following discovery of the body, none of the board or theatre personnel had been informed of what had happened.² Dacus immediately informed Casa board

¹Interview with Fuller, August 7, 1980.

²Interview with Brooks, June 26, 1980.

chairman Mayor Bayard Friedman, and following an emergency meeting of the board of directors, an interim management committee composed of Friedman, James C. Fuller, and Charles E. Marshall were appointed to run the theatre through its 1964 season.

It was not known what effect Snowden's death would have on the season, but advance sales of season tickets and discount coupon books had been especially large due to the acquisition of both My Fair Lady, which had been released unexpectedly for stock production, and The Sound of Music, two of the most successful musicals ever produced on Broadway. The rights to the shows had been secured following a battle with the Dallas Summer Musicals, which ended in a compromise enabling both cities to have both shows by alternating the production dates.³ By the arrangement, Fort Worth would open the season with The Sound of Music, making it that show's first production in summer stock as well as its first production in-the-round.⁴ Both that show and My Fair Lady, which closed the season, were extremely successful, with each running for three weeks. The Sound of Music turned away as many as 150 people for some performances, to become the theatre's most popular show through 1964.⁵

³Fort Worth Star-Telegram, January 12, 1964.

⁴Wichita Falls Times, May 31, 1964.

⁵Fort Worth Press, June 8, 1964.

The 1964 season brought the premiere of a third successful Broadway musical, The Unsinkable Molly Brown, to Fort Worth and with it came Ruta Lee, an actress who was to become almost an institution at Casa Mañana.⁶ In the next seventeen seasons, between 1964 and 1980, she appeared at Casa sixteen times. Despite the fact that several opera and Broadway stars had appeared on Casa's stage, Ruta Lee in 1964 was an entertainer better known to the general public through her work in several movies, including Witness for the Prosecution and Seven Brides for Seven Brothers, and numerous television appearances.⁷ Her popularity with the media and with audiences, however, almost never occurred. She had seen Molly Brown starring Tammy Grimes and did not like the show; yet some time later, after being contacted by Michael Pollock, she was persuaded to read the script and was eventually signed for the title role.⁸

On the opening night of Molly Brown, Ruta became yet another victim of Casa Mañana's by now notorious ramps, but not before she had become a hit with the audience and the critics. The musical's author, Meredith Willson, after

⁶Richard Morris, The Unsinkable Molly Brown, lyrics by Meredith Willson, 1960.

⁷Witness for the Prosecution, directed by Billy Wilder, starring Tyrone Power and Charles Laughton, 1957; Seven Brides for Seven Brothers, directed by Stanley Donen, starring Howard Keel and Jane Powell, 1954.

⁸Interview with Ruta Lee, actress, in Fort Worth, Texas, July 7, 1980.

viewing the show, called her performance the definitive interpretation of the role, surpassing even that of Tammy Grimes, who had created the role on Broadway, and Debbie Reynolds, who had brought the play to the screen.⁹ The show was the third largest grosser of the season, largely based on Lee's performance, even though it could not surpass the immense popularity of The Sound of Music and My Fair Lady.¹⁰

A season of three hits would already have been considered successful, but 1964 was destined to become one of the most successful seasons in the history of Casa Mañana. A revival of Oklahoma! was called "one of the better productions in the theatre's history," and in addition, Casa Mañana scored an unexpected coup with its production of Finian's Rainbow, long considered too controversial for the area with its theme of racial bigotry.¹¹ Although the play had been a Broadway hit in 1947, it had never been staged closer than Houston, and Virgil Miers of the Dallas Times Herald took special note of the event: ". . . no one other stroke than this filling-in of a stage void for the area's theatre-goers has done more to justify its [Casa Mañana's] being. It wasn't that the move was so fearless, but so

⁹ Interview with Brooks, June 26, 1980.

¹⁰ Financial Records, Casa Mañana Musicals, Inc., Fort Worth, Texas.

¹¹ Fort Worth Star-Telegram, August 12, 1964. E. Y. Harburg and Fred Saily, Finian's Rainbow, lyrics by Harburg, music by Burton Lane, 1947.

wise."¹² Starring in the title role as Finian McLonergan was Clarence Nordstorm, who had performed in the Ziegfield Follies as a juvenile lead with such greats as Will Rogers, W. C. Fields, Ray Dooley, and Ann Pennington, and who went on to appear in the movie musical 42nd Street, in which he immortalized the song "Shuffle Off to Buffalo."¹³

The other two shows of the season, Irma la Douce and Mr. President, also showed profits, making it appear that a practice instituted during the 1963 season and used to choose the musicals for the 1964 season was successful.¹⁴ In 1963 theatre management had begun balloting by theatre patrons on their preferences for upcoming seasons. With the exception of My Fair Lady, which had not been released for stock production and therefore was not on the ballot in 1963, the final statistics in terms of attendance had been nearly identical to the results predicted by the balloting, with balloters choosing (1) Sound of Music, (2) Oklahoma!, (3) Molly Brown, and (4) Irma la Douce, although My Fair Lady ultimately became the most profitable musical of the season.¹⁵

¹²Dallas Times Herald, July 29, 1964.

¹³Fort Worth Press, August 2, 1964.

¹⁴Alexandre Breffort and Julian More, Irma la Douce, lyrics by Breffort, music by Marguerite Monnot; Howard Lindsay and Russell Crouse, Mr. President, music and lyrics by Irving Berlin, 1962.

¹⁵Fort Worth Star-Telegram, August 30, 1964.

The success of the 1964 season can more probably be attributed to the fortunate set of circumstances that allowed several of Broadway's all-time hits to be scheduled into one season.

The 1964 season was one of record profits, grossing around \$475,000. Although the season was declared financially solvent, there still remained many unpaid bills from previous, less successful seasons, and the \$210,000 debt which had been floated in 1958 to buy seats for the theatre after the city turned the building over to Casa Mañana. James Snowden had always been able to renew the note, but with his death and the appointment of a new board, the banks made it clear that the debt must be retired or the theatre would be closed.¹⁶

With the seating of the new board in September, James C. Fuller, who had previously served on the theatre's interim management committee following Snowden's death, was elected as the new president of Casa Mañana. Other members of the new executive committee included Mrs. Amon Carter, Jr., Sam Weatherford, Charles Anton, L. R. Sarazan, and Robert Utter.¹⁷ Fuller, an assistant vice-president and director of public relations for Bell Helicopter, had as his first task finding a way to pay off Casa's long-standing debts.

¹⁶ Interview with Jary, October 15, 1980.

¹⁷ Fort Worth Star-Telegram, September 29, 1964.

The Red-Seat Campaign

It was decided that the necessary money had to be raised by Thanksgiving or the theatre would have to close. To meet the deadline, a plan was devised by advertising executive William O. Jary, a man who had been associated with both the old and new Casa Mañana.¹⁸ Part of the plan was the securing of at least \$50,000 in larger gifts from the city's most substantial firms and individuals, with another \$20,000 coming, it was hoped, through direct contributions of small amounts. The main thrust of the campaign was, however, through an ingenious plan to "sell" Casa Mañana's 1,832 red seats. For each 100-dollar contribution, a patron or business would have his or its name engraved on a brass nameplate, which would then be attached permanently to one of the theatre's red seats. As an extra incentive, with each seat came a season ticket.¹⁹

The campaign, which was to last only thirty days, started slowly, failing to garner the support it had been hoped would come from the business community. With about a week remaining before Thanksgiving, only about 40 percent of the seats had been sold and James Fuller reiterated that

¹⁸Interview with Fuller, August 7, 1980.

¹⁹Letter from James C. Fuller, president of Casa Mañana, to members of the board of directors, Fort Worth, Texas, September 15, 1964.

if the money was not raised, the theatre would have to close its doors permanently.²⁰

The salvation of the red-seat campaign came from an unexpected place. As newspapers, radio, and television reported the plight of the theatre, the appeal turned to the average citizens of Fort Worth, and in gradually increasing numbers the seats began to sell. On Thanksgiving eve fewer than 200 seats remained. The contributions came from a wide variety of places and individuals, including school children and office workers who pooled their money to buy a seat and then held drawings to see who got the season ticket. Among those buying seats was Paul Whiteman, famed bandleader of the original 1936 Casa Mañana. Many individuals sent in much smaller contributions, however, just to have a part in saving the theatre rather than to receive a season ticket or tax deduction.²¹

The Wednesday before Thanksgiving had been declared "Red-Seat Day" and for the event a bank of telephones manned by the theatre board's vice-presidents was set up in the theatre's lobby. As early as 7:00 A.M. the phones began to ring, and by 8:00 A.M., the scheduled starting time, over \$10,000 had already been raised. Before noon the last red seat had been sold, helped along by block purchases of seats

²⁰Interview with Fuller, August 7, 1980.

²¹Interview with Dacus, September 23, 1980.

by several large firms. Even though no seats remained, contributions still continued to arrive. Businesses who had purchased blocks of seats offered to re-sell their seats to individuals who had missed out, and before the phone lines were finally closed, \$233,000 had been raised. For the first time in its history, Casa Mañana was completely free from debt due to the overwhelming response of the public and had, in addition, nearly \$50,000 of working capital with which to open the 1965 season.²² On Thanksgiving Day, 1964, in recognition of Casa Mañana's triumph, Star-Telegram staff cartoonist Harold Maples prepared a special drawing which pictured the theatre's round building laid out on a platter as a tantalizingly garnished Thanksgiving turkey.²³

The 1965 Season

The 1965 season opened with South Pacific, bringing back Ruta Lee from 1964's Unsinkable Molly Brown. The season also saw the return of Mace Barrett, starring in both 110 in the Shade and The King and I, and Jack Harrold, starring in A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum.²⁴ The season,

²²Ibid. This scheme has been imitated by numerous theatres in America. The most successful is perhaps the University of Utah's theatre in Salt Lake City, Utah. (Conversation with Dr. Stanley K. Hamilton, North Texas State University, Denton, Texas, February 6, 1981.)

²³Fort Worth Star-Telegram, November 26, 1964.

²⁴N. Richard Nash, 110 in the Shade, music by Harvey Schmidt, lyrics by Tom Jones; Burt Shevelove and Larry Gelbart, A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum, lyrics and music by Stephen Sondheim, 1962.

although profitable, could not compare to the 1964 season, since it lacked first-run shows of "hit" caliber and the popular appeal of The Sound of Music and My Fair Lady (with the possible exception of Camelot) and further had to compete with the Dallas Summer Musicals, who had booked the national touring companies of two hugely successful Broadway products, Funny Girl and Hello, Dolly, which were as yet unreleased for stock production.²⁵ Only one show, The Most Happy Fella, lost money, although the season's one operetta came very close, making only about \$500.²⁶ It was with that show, Roberta, that a criticism which had occurred with some regularity through Michael Pollock's tenure as director of the theatre reappeared.²⁷

Roberta was a 1933 Jerome Kern operetta about an American football player who suddenly finds himself in the world of high fashion after he inherits his aunt's Paris salon. Except for the basic story line, the Casa Mañana show bore little resemblance to the original production, which made famous, among other tunes, "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes." In one scene a live rock band played as several "go-go" dancers

²⁵Dallas Times Herald, May 16, 1965.

²⁶Financial records, Casa Mañana Musicals, Inc., Fort Worth, Texas. Frank Loesser, The Most Happy Fella, music and lyrics by Loesser, 1956.

²⁷Otto Harbach, Roberta, music by Jerome Kern, lyrics by Harbach, 1933.

performed. Many Kern songs not in the original show were added and a Metropolitan Opera star performed arias for the audience. One critic referred to the whole performance as ". . . a somewhat strange evening of musical comedy. . . ." ²⁸

Casa Mañana's First Director Is Fired

Rumors had begun as early as August of 1964 that Michael Pollock might not be invited to return to the theatre as producer-director for the 1965 season, following the death of James Snowden. ²⁹ Then during the run of Roberta, Pollock wrote a letter to the Star-Telegram objecting to the newspaper's review, precipitating a controversy among Casa board members. In a meeting of the board, President James Fuller reiterated a policy of the theatre "never to attempt to counter, correct or enter into controversy with reference to a review of the shows." ³⁰ Whether this incident had any bearing on the board's decision, it is not known, but in September the rumors became fact. Pollock, who had been the theatre's first and only director since its inception in 1958, was officially released. ³¹

²⁸Dallas Morning News, July 6, 1965.

²⁹Fort Worth Star-Telegram, September 29, 1964.

³⁰Minutes of the board of directors, Casa Mañana Musicals, Fort Worth, Texas, July 14, 1965.

³¹Dallas Morning News, October 6, 1965.

Through his eight seasons with Casa Mañana, Michael Pollock had directed fifty-seven musicals and numerous legitimate plays and children's productions. It cannot be discounted that much of the success of Casa Mañana's early years was due to the quality of Michael Pollock's productions. In 1978 Star-Telegram amusements editor, Elston Brooks picked what he considered to be the ten best productions of Casa Mañana in its first twenty seasons. Of those musicals chosen, nine of the ten had been directed by Pollock.³² While Brooks tended to discount this somewhat by pointing out that Pollock was with the theatre longer than other directors, it still must be noted that only one musical on the list was directed by someone other than Pollock, and that one was directed by a non-union director in 1973, when Actor's Equity successfully closed the theatre. Furthermore, that same musical, 1973's Promises, Promises,³³ is the only one on the list to occur after 1965.³³

A new rental agreement was worked out with the city following the successful 1965 season. Previously Casa had paid a set amount of \$28,180 to the city, an amount not always easy to raise when the theatre experienced meager profits.³⁴ In 1963 and 1964 that very thing had happened

³²Fort Worth Star-Telegram, September 24, 1978.

³³Interview with Brooks, June 26, 1980. Neil Simon, Promises, Promises, music by Burt Bacharach, lyrics by Hal David, 1968.

³⁴Fort Worth Star-Telegram, March 16, 1979.

and Casa Mañana had defaulted on its rent even though it subsequently was able to pay back the amount following the Red-Seat Campaign and the more profitable seasons in 1964 and 1965. To compensate for less profitable seasons, the new agreement provided for rental payment in the form of a percentage of the theatre's gross receipts. Under this new agreement the theatre was able to remain current in its rent up until 1974.³⁵

Another change following the 1965 season came in the form of a new \$30,000 scene shop and storage area for the theatre. Since its opening in 1958, Casa Mañana had been using the Pioneer Palace, the only surviving building of the 1936 Frontier Fiesta, to store scenery and costumes and for additional rehearsal space. The fire department, however, had consistently warned that the old building was unsafe due to its dilapidated condition, and with the construction of the new shop, the old Palace, scene of wild parties and gambling in its heyday, was finally demolished. The new workshop was planned as a multi-purpose structure that during the winter could furnish classroom space for the theatre's Merry-Go-Round School, which since its first season in 1962 had grown steadily until it boasted the largest enrollment in the nation.³⁶ It was further planned that

³⁵ Interview with Dacus, September 23, 1980.

³⁶ Dallas Morning News, November 26, 1964. Casa Mañana's Merry-Go-Round Theatre opened in the fall of 1962 under the

with the new building's completion, Casa would sell it to the city and then pay rent on the property. In addition to these changes, an electric winch was purchased for the existing theatre plant to give greater flexibility in raising and lowering the lighting ring over the stage. The supports of the dome itself were stiffened to provide the additional strength needed to support the new machinery.³⁷

It was not until December that a successor was named to replace Michael Pollock. Announced as Casa Mañana's new director was Richard France, who was better known to Fort Worth audiences as an actor, singer, and dancer, having previously appeared in Casa Mañana's productions of Bye, Bye Birdie, West Side Story, and Carnival. He was the husband of choreographer Ellen Ray, who had worked at the theatre in previous seasons and who was once again named choreographer for the 1966 season. France had previously performed on Broadway in the long-running What Makes Sammy Run? with Steve Lawrence, and along with the announcement of his hiring, it was revealed that he would take the title role in the same musical for Casa Mañana.³⁸ In a news conference

direction of Mrs. Iris Siff, executive director, and Mason Johnson, dean. Mrs. Siff had formed the Alley Academy in 1948 as an auxiliary school of the Alley Theatre in Houston, Texas. The director in 1964 was Mrs. Sharon Bengé.

³⁷Dallas Morning News, February 11, 1966.

³⁸Fort Worth Star-Telegram, December 2, 1965.

in April of 1966 to introduce the new director, France explained as part of his directorial philosophy that he would not go so far with innovations as to "destroy the enchantment of the theatre. . . . There will be nothing so extreme that people will say, 'What a tremendous change!' We'll stick to the scripts."³⁹

The 1966 Season

Based on Casa Mañana's patron balloting system, which was in its third season, the slate of shows chosen for 1966 included only three new Broadway shows. The great majority of the productions were revivals of musicals previously seen at the theatre, which pointed to a growing problem among musical stock theatres only then beginning to be realized: the fact that Broadway could not indefinitely continue to turn out tremendously popular musicals of the caliber of The King and I, South Pacific, or The Sound of Music. This was forcing theatres to turn more and more to revivals of popular old shows. It was also becoming increasingly evident that what New York theatre-goers, who eagerly scurry to see new shows and unknown commodities, will like and what the general American public will like were not always in accord. Furthermore, many Broadway shows were tailored for

³⁹ Fort Worth Press, April 5, 1966. France's statement was evidently a reference to at least one of the reasons for the firing of Michael Pollock.

a certain star, and without the virtues of that star the show had little appeal. Very few shows were consistently strong enough in both story and music to capture an audience's imagination. Some shows were too "inside," esoteric, and even too exotic in concept for the average American. This was noted by Fort Worth Press columnist Jack Gordon, who stated the problem as "not enough new product from Broadway with box office appeal."⁴⁰

With the first show of the 1966 season, a season chosen by Casa Mañana's patron balloting system, it became obvious that Broadway's problem had come to Fort Worth. Jack Gordon later in the season noted that what an audience would turn out to see was becoming a life-and-death question for Casa Mañana. Broadway's recently released Pulitzer Prize-winning hit, How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying, barely broke even despite what was described by critics as a "bright, well-organized production" by Richard France in his Casa directorial debut, and by Melvin Dacus, who had recently been named producer for the theatre in addition to his title as general manager.⁴¹ The season's second show, however, the forty-year-old Show Boat, played to capacity crowds, causing one of the theatre's board members to comment, "We are grateful for the support of the older shows . . . but

⁴⁰Fort Worth Press, July 7, 1966.

⁴¹Ibid., May 24, 1966.

. . . How many times can a theatre do 'Showboat'?"⁴²

The two shows, despite the marked contrast in audience reaction, were both praised unanimously by critics for the smoothness and skill exhibited in production, with Star-Telegram critic Elston Brooks noting,

The time when opening night was a dress rehearsal for paying customers has disappeared under the France Regime. Sunday night dress rehearsals now find the cast sometimes going through the show twice. Not unusual in the theatre, but a departure from past Casa history.⁴³

As the season went on, however, France too began to draw criticism, most notably for What Makes Sammy Run?, the musical in which he both starred and directed and which became the biggest money-loser since Wildcat, in 1963.⁴⁴ Critics were complimentary of France's performance in the title role, but several noted that since the role was so demanding, it left him little time for his directorial duties. As a result, the rest of the cast seemed to lack the polish and coordination evident in the first two shows of the season.⁴⁵

The season, as a whole, although profitable, was disappointing in terms of audience response and critical

⁴²Fort Worth Press, May 22, 1966.

⁴³Fort Worth Star-Telegram, July 12, 1966. The comment was evidently a reference to the contrasting directorial styles of France and Pollock.

⁴⁴Fort Worth Press, September 4, 1966. Bud and Stuart Schulberg, What Makes Sammy Run? music and lyrics by Ervin Drake.

⁴⁵Dallas Morning News, July 20, 1966.

acceptance. At least one critic placed the blame for this with Richard France, attributing part of the failure to miscasting by France of key roles in several shows, including What Makes Sammy Run?, Guys and Dolls, and Once Upon a Mattress.⁴⁶ The season grossed \$397,525 on eight shows, but this was nearly \$50,000 less than in 1965 for the same number of shows. West Side Story had been the top-grossing show in 1964 and again in 1966; yet three shows from the 1965 season were more profitable.⁴⁷

Two other factors surely had a part in the season's disappointments, however. One that has been previously mentioned was the fact that success on Broadway does not necessarily guarantee success for a show in summer stock. Another factor was that Casa Mañana's patron balloting system, which had accurately predicted the popularity of shows in the 1965 season, had not fared as well in 1966, throwing some doubt on its credibility. The overwhelming favorite of patrons for the 1966 season had been How to Succeed in Business, which in the final standings was able to do no better than fifth.⁴⁸ Earlier in the year, before the season began, Mel Dacus had been quoted by reporters as saying, "This is market

⁴⁶ Jay Thompson, Once Upon a Mattress, lyrics by Marshall Barer, music by Mary Rodgers.

⁴⁷ Fort Worth Star-Telegram, September 11, 1966.

⁴⁸ Abe Burrows, How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying, lyrics and music by Frank Loesser, 1961.

research in its most refined form"; yet following the season this assessment seemed less than accurate.⁴⁹

A third factor which may have had some influence on the season's success, or more accurately one which did not have enough influence, was the absence of the former excitement surrounding the advent of the new season. Early in the season an interesting, if ironic, complaint was lodged at a meeting of the executive officers of the theatre. Whereas before Michael Pollock had been criticized for his "innovations" and homespun asides, now it was noted that the theatre was no longer doing things to "shock" people. It was pointed out that people look for "gimmicks" and concern was expressed that there was not the same excitement being generated in the 1966 season as had been present in previous seasons. President James C. Fuller even noted that "there must always be new and different things that would keep audiences from becoming disenchanted or the productions becoming stale."⁵⁰

Richard France Is Fired

The 1966 season was not without its successes, however, including revivals of Lil Abner and Flower Drum Song; yet in November of 1966, both Richard France and his wife,

⁴⁹Dallas Morning News, February 11, 1966.

⁵⁰Minutes of the board of directors, Casa Mañana Musicals, Fort Worth, Texas, June 1, 1966.

choreographer Ellen Ray, were fired. Newspapers speculated from comments made by new board president, Sam Weatherford III, that the board did indeed blame France for several of the season's failures. Another reason suggested was reported pressure from France on the board of directors to reach a decision quickly on 1967's director. At the same time Robert Ennis Turoff was named as the theatre's new director. A writer as well as a director, Turoff was not an actor, however. His directorial credits were numerous, including Kansas City's Starlight Theatre and St. John Terrell's Music Circus in Lambertville, New Jersey.⁵¹

Earlier, in September, following the close of the 1966 season, a new plan for closer cooperation between Casa Mafiana and the Dallas Summer Musicals had been mutually announced by both theatres in light of a problem that had grown steadily for several seasons. The problem, duplication of shows, had begun in 1964, when both theatres sought to premiere The Sound of Music and My Fair Lady. An amicable agreement had been reached at the time whereby the two theatres alternated show dates, but in 1965 the problem recurred when both theatres premiered 110 in the Shade on the same evening. In 1966 the problem was compounded, when both West Side Story and Flower Drum Song were duplicated. It was hoped that through the new plan, some duplications could be avoided, while not

⁵¹Fort Worth Star-Telegram, November 11, 1966.

necessarily precluding presentation of the same musical by both theatres.⁵²

Such duplications inevitably encouraged comparisons of the two organizations. Both theatres had experienced success although operating under widely disparate policies. Dallas remained loyal to the "star system," while Fort Worth continued to sign relatively unknown talent. An article appearing in the Dallas Morning News pointed out that Fort Worth, however, had one decided advantage over Dallas. When producing the same show, the average production cost for a Casa Mañana musical in 1966 was \$50,000, while the Summer Musicals, partly due to its use of name stars, averaged twice that amount. As Casa Mañana prepared to enter its tenth anniversary season in 1967, it could point with pride to the fact that since the theatre's beginning in 1958, it had consistently operated at a profit.⁵³

⁵²Dallas Morning News, September 8, 1966.

⁵³Ibid.

CHAPTER VI

1967-1969: THREE PROSPEROUS YEARS

New Staff Appointments

As preparations for the 1967 anniversary season began, Casa Mañana once again found itself without a director, when Robert Ennis Turoff asked for a release from his contract to ready a musical of his own for possible Broadway production. The unevenness which had characterized the 1966 season was avoided, however, with the timely hiring of Bernard "Buff" Shurr to replace Turoff. In addition it was announced that Joseph Stecko had been signed as the theatre's new music director.¹

Shurr had experience as a choreographer as well as director, and it was planned that he would combine both duties on four shows of the season. Like Richard France, Shurr was also a performer, having as one of his credits the role of Marco in the Broadway musical, Carnival, opposite Anna Maria Alberghetti. There were no plans for him to perform at Casa Mañana, however.²

Joseph Stecko, the new music director, was destined to become a virtual institution at Casa Mañana, in 1980 completing

¹Fort Worth Star-Telegram, March 24, 1967.

²Ibid.

his fourteenth season with the theatre. Part of Stecko's charisma with Fort Worth audiences began in the summer of 1967, when on his first stay in the city, he bought a green 1951 Plymouth to fulfill his transportation needs. The thing he had not counted on was becoming attached to the vintage car. At season's end, after he had been given assurances by a mechanic that the car was in good condition he decided to drive home to New York.³ Local newspapers continued to give the old Plymouth nearly as much coverage as the musicals until Stecko finally sold it several years later.⁴

Even without his Plymouth, Stecko probably would have been successful, for he brought a wide range of experience to Casa Mañana. He had conducted in both permanent arena theatres similar to Casa as well as tent theatres. He had been considered for the job in 1965, but it was not until 1967, when current music director Arthur Lief suffered a heart attack, that Stecko was contacted again.⁵

The 1967 Season

The Unsinkable Molly Brown was chosen to open the tenth anniversary season, chiefly because it was a vehicle for Ruta Lee, who had become immensely popular with Fort Worth

³Fort Worth Press, September 10, 1967.

⁴Interview with Joseph Stecko, music director, Casa Mañana Musicals, Fort Worth, Texas, June 15, 1980.

⁵Ibid.

audiences. She was returning after a season's absence when no suitable play could be found for her in 1966. Seated in the audience on opening night was the show's composer Meredith Willson, himself a fan of Miss Lee's.⁶ Evidently the psychology of producer Mel Dacus in choosing the combination of Molly Brown and Ruta Lee to open the season was correct, for the show was a record-breaker, not only for an opening musical at the theatre but also for a two-week show with no added performances.⁷ As part of his release agreement, Robert Ennis Turoff returned to Casa Mañana to direct the second show of the season, On a Clear Day You Can See Forever.⁸ The third show of the season was Oliver, a musical version of Dickens' Oliver Twist.⁹ Although it had run five years in London and two years on Broadway, in addition to winning Tony awards for its music and lyrics, the show did not fare well at Casa Mañana. It lost money and became the lowest grossing show of the season.¹⁰ Featured in the title role of Oliver was Ned Van Zandt, who only four months before had been struck by a car and nearly killed. Still not fully

⁶Dallas Morning News, May 24, 1967.

⁷Fort Worth Star-Telegram, June 2, 1967.

⁸Ibid., March 24, 1967. Alan Jay Lerner, On a Clear Day You Can See Forever, music by Burton Lane, lyrics by Lerner, 1965.

⁹Lionel Bart, Oliver, music and lyrics by Bart.

¹⁰Financial Records, Casa Mañana Musicals, Fort Worth, Texas.

recovered during auditions, he nevertheless performed on crutches and won the role. Despite the show's disappointing run, the quality of Buff Shurr's direction was drawing favorable attention from critics, with Elston Brooks noting, ". . . he'll probably end up as the theatre's best director in its 10 seasons."¹¹

To coincide with the actual anniversary date of Casa Mañana's opening in July of 1958, the theatre revived its first show, Can-Can. At the original premiere, following a day of torrential rainstorms, the unpaved parking lot had become a quagmire and the shiny aluminum dome had leaked. As if in honor of the event, once again in 1967 rains drenched the opening.¹² This time, however, the parking lot was paved and the roof no longer leaked, perhaps symbolic of the improvements that had occurred at the theatre over its first ten years. In 1967 theatre officials could boast of ten profitable seasons, and thanks to a fund-raising drive in 1964, the theatre's red seats, the parking lot, and a new theatre annex for construction of scenery were all paid for. Payments for production bills and rent were also up to date.¹³

¹¹Fort Worth Star-Telegram, June 20, 1967.

¹²Reportedly Mel Dacus began to look upon opening night thunderstorms as good omens after several of the theatre's more successful premieres occurred on stormy evenings. (Reported by Elston Brooks, amusements editor for Fort Worth Star-Telegram, December 16, 1980.)

¹³Interview with Dacus, September 23, 1980.

Over its first ten seasons, Casa Mañana had also gained prestige steadily among critics for its artistic achievements. Some measure of this prestige, and not a small amount of irony, can be glimpsed in the critical comments of Dallas writer William A. Payne in reviewing Funny Girl, when he noted flaws that he called "surprising . . . in a Casa Mañana production, particularly in the difficulty with hearing words from the stage. . . ." ¹⁴ The very fact that such problems were now considered "surprising" clearly removed the accusation of "not enough professional know-how" made by one critic only ten seasons before. ¹⁵ The theatre had indeed come a long way.

The latter part of the 1967 season saw the return of three of its most successful shows, The Sound of Music, The Desert Song, and My Fair Lady. The Desert Song had been chosen despite its age, for its distinction as one of the ten most successful musicals of all time. In searching for a way to promote the show, Melvin Dacus recalled the suggestion of a theatre patron who thought it might be interesting to locate actor/singer John Boles. In 1929 Boles had been the first to bring the role of the Red Shadow to the screen. A veteran performer with over seventy films to his credit, Boles had not appeared on the screen since 1952,

¹⁴Dallas Morning News, August 16, 1967.

¹⁵Ibid., August 27, 1958.

when he had appeared in a disastrous film called "Babes in Baghdad" with Paulette Goddard and Gypsy Rose Lee.¹⁶ Not even knowing if Boles was still alive, Dacus made numerous inquiries and telephone calls, all to no avail. When it appeared that the search was indeed fruitless, Boles, now a prosperous businessman, was finally located scarcely 250 miles away in San Angelo. He agreed to appear on opening night.¹⁷

On August 15, 1967, a headline in the Abilene Reporter News announced, "Funny Girl Opens to Big House in Dallas." It sometimes seemed that Casa Mañana was destined to live indefinitely in the shadow of Dallas' reputation, even to the point of the Summer Musicals' receiving undeserved credit for Casa's successes. Although the article following the headline did mention Casa Mañana by name, the only other allusion to Fort Worth was in a reference to Elston Brooks, "amusement editor of the Fort Worth Star-Telegram."¹⁸

Evidently the misinformation contained in the Abilene paper had little effect on Funny Girl, which became the third-highest grossing musical of the season behind revivals of The Sound of Music and The Unsinkable Molly Brown.¹⁹

¹⁶ San Angelo Times, July 21, 1967.

¹⁷ Dallas Morning News, July 21, 1967.

¹⁸ Abilene Reporter News, August 15, 1967.

¹⁹ Financial Records, Casa Mañana Musicals, Fort Worth, Texas. Isobel Lennart, Funny Girl, lyrics by Bob Merrill, music by Jule Styne, 1964.

Although Funny Girl had previously been announced as part of the upcoming season, it was not known if the show would actually be released for production by the summer of 1967. It was not until July of 1967, however, scarcely a month before it was due to open at Casa Mañana, that Funny Girl finally completed its Broadway run.²⁰ Other complications developed and it seemed for a time that the musical might severely test the old adage, "the show must go on." Following a death in the family of a key supporting player, one of those called upon in an eleventh hour shifting of roles was the theatre's property mistress, who gamely appeared on stage, script in hand, enabling the play to complete its run.²¹

The 1967 season closed with a total gross of \$459,200, only \$15,000 under the record season of 1964.²² At the season's end, general manager Melvin Dacus reported that nearly one-half of the summer's 113 performances were sell-outs. Surveys taken by the theatre showed that nearly one-third of the audiences came from outside the immediate Fort Worth area, indicating that the theatre's support base had developed well beyond local patronage over the past ten years.²³

²⁰ Fort Worth Press, August 13, 1967.

²¹ Fort Worth Star-Telegram, August 28, 1967.

²² Financial records, Casa Mañana Musicals.

²³ Pat Record, "Ten Candles for Casa," Fort Worth Magazine (October, 1967), p. 38.

The 1968 Season

In July of 1968 an article appeared in the Houston Post, precipitated by the failure of a theatre in Houston similar to Casa Mañana. Although it was not known at the time, the gloomy prospects of the Music Theatre were harbingers of the troubled financial times coming also for Casa Mañana. The Post article raised the logical question of why a plush, air-conditioned, easily accessible theatre was failing, while in some areas audiences were eagerly driving far into the New England countryside to see Broadway shows in the uncomfortable atmosphere of a tent, where one must sit in folding chairs and constantly swat mosquitoes. This question, however, did not concern Casa Mañana officials in 1968, who could point proudly to their largest advance ticket sale in the theatre's history, a record \$40,000. A fact that made this statistic even more impressive was that all of these advance sales had occurred six months before the season's scheduled opening.²⁴ This accomplishment prompted Melvin Dacus to comment, "When the theatre started in 1957 I thought it would be a success. . . . But I must say I never dreamed Casa Mañana would be so completely accepted by the community."²⁵

The 1968 season marked the return of director Robert Ennis Turoff, who the previous season had asked for a release

²⁴Houston Post, July 28, 1968.

²⁵Fort Worth Star-Telegram, May 20, 1968.

from his contract. When Casa Mañana officials could not come to terms with Buff Shurr, Turoff's replacement in 1967, Turoff was once again invited to return. Returning also to the theatre were two other current favorites of local audiences. Ruta Lee was signed to open the season in a revival of Annie Get Your Gun and the white-haired Joseph Stecko once again was in the pit conducting the Casa Mañana orchestra.²⁶

A popular performer of a different era, which included the 1936 Casa Mañana, also made her nostalgic return to Fort Worth to re-create an act she had made famous over thirty years earlier. In 1936 Sally Rand had performed her famed nude ballet on Casa Mañana's gargantuan outdoor revolving stage. In 1968 she returned to the new Casa Mañana's far more intimate surroundings, a fact which surely must have raised speculation as to how the dance, which revealed only what Miss Rand wished to be seen, could possibly be performed in-the-round. The appearance, scheduled in conjunction with the theatre's run of A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum, apparently presented no problems for Miss Rand, but her close proximity to the audience bothered at least one critic, who commented, ". . . her dance, unchanged as to routine and costume since she first appeared in Fort Worth, was not only out of place but in poor taste

²⁶ Ibid., January 7, 1968.

on the Casa stage."²⁷ Miss Rand returned once more to Casa Mañana, in 1974, once again performing the number she had made famous. Reportedly, she was seventy at the time. In 1979 Sally Rand died at the age of seventy-five.²⁸

By 1968 Casa Mañana had settled into an eight show season, once again weighted heavily toward revivals. Only two new shows made their appearance, including Walking Happy, which made only a modest profit, and Half a Sixpence, which lost money.²⁹ It had been hoped that Hello Dolly would be released in time for inclusion in the season, but that show's Broadway run was so successful that it was not finally seen at Casa Mañana until the 1971 season four years later.³⁰ The other shows of the season included Annie Get Your Gun, Kismet, Oklahoma, A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum, Gypsy, and Camelot. It was Oklahoma, the first musical to make three appearances at the theatre, that once again was the top-grossing show of the season, despite the fact that it was celebrating its twenty-fifth anniversary that year. Finishing second and third were Camelot and A Funny Thing

²⁷Dallas Morning News, July 17, 1968.

²⁸New York Times, September 1, 1979.

²⁹Fort Worth Star-Telegram, September 8, 1968. Roger O. Hirson and Ketti Frings, Walking Happy, lyrics by Sammy Cahn, music by James Van Heusen; Beverly Cross, Half a Sixpence, music and lyrics by David Heneker, 1963.

³⁰Dallas Times Herald, February 26, 1968.

Happened on the Way to the Forum, although the three shows actually were separated by a margin of less than \$200.00. Forum received dismal reviews, but the audiences came anyway, perhaps drawn in part by the lure of seeing Sally Rand's famed feather dance.³¹ Only two shows of the season, Kismet and Half a Sixpence, failed to show a profit. Half a Sixpence, nevertheless, was praised as "one of the best musicals produced on Casa's round stage" and was highly lauded for the choreography of Pittman Corry who had come to Casa Mañana from the Atlanta Municipal Theatre.³²

The 1969 Season

In 1969, for the second time in its history, Casa Mañana decided to attempt an untried musical, the first time having been the premiere of Calamity Jane in 1961. This time the show chosen was Hello, Sucker, written by Casa Mañana's own director, Robert Ennis Turoff. The show originally had been planned as a musical comedy based on the taxi business in New York City. In doing research in New York Times microfilm files, Turoff had come across the name of Larry Fay, considered an early entrepreneur of taxis in New York. Paired with Fay's name was that of Texas Guinan, an entertainer whom Fay claimed as his protegee. During the

³¹Dallas Morning News, July 17, 1968.

³²Ibid., June 5, 1968.

Prohibition period, Guinan had become known as the "Queen of the Nightclubs" in New York. Turoff became fascinated with Guinan and changed his musical comedy about the taxi business to one focusing on the Waco, Texas, girl who had been the "Queen" of New York. The title of the musical was derived from Texas Guinan's greeting to her nightclub audiences each evening, "Hello Suckers!"³³

In 1967 when Turoff had asked to be released from his contract with Casa Mañana, it appeared that a Broadway production of Hello, Sucker was imminent. New York producers optioned the show as a vehicle for actress Jane Morgan, but when the book could not be readied in time for fall production, Morgan had returned her option to Turoff and composer Wilson Stone, putting the musical in limbo. It was with Turoff's return to Fort Worth in 1968 that it was first suggested that Hello, Sucker might be done by Casa Mañana.³⁴

"I have always liked characters who are bigger than life; I like characters who are rags to riches," said Ruta Lee, explaining why she was attracted to the role of Texas Guinan.³⁵ Signed to co-star with her as James White, the government man who first tries to silence her but then falls in love with her, was another extremely popular Casa Mañana

³³Hello, Sucker program, Casa Mañana Musicals, 1969.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵ Interview with Ruta Lee, July 10, 1980.

performer, Mace Barrett. Rehearsals for the show began in late April, with one of Casa's earliest openings ever scheduled for Saturday, May 17th.³⁶

The show opened to lukewarm reviews which were generally appreciative of what was described as a "forceful" performance by Ruta Lee and a "generally pleasant" score by Wilson Stone. The show was criticized, however, for its "lack of uniqueness" and a book that was described as "heavy on cliché and basically bland." Still, the theatre was commended for gambling on the premiere, thus setting an example for other theatres.³⁷ Fort Worth columnist Elston Brooks noted much the same flaws, saying that the show "has all the musical comedy ingredients to rocket it to Broadway--except one. The rocket never goes off." While Brooks noted that the show seemed to have "everything" required of a successful musical, it lacked what he called "a high point, a show stopper, a memorable moment."³⁸

Despite the critics' less than enthusiastic response to the show, Hello, Sucker was the highest grossing show of the 1969 season. Due to the inflated production costs incurred by the world premiere, however, the show lost nearly

³⁶Dallas Morning News, April 3, 1969.

³⁷Dallas Times Herald, May 21, 1969.

³⁸Fort Worth Star-Telegram, May 19, 1969.

\$16,000.³⁹ It was probably the premiere of Hello, Sucker also which prevented the 1969 season from setting the records that 1967 and 1968 did. It was also becoming evident by 1969 that theatre patrons would not return indefinitely to see old shows, even such perennial favorites as The Music Man and The King and I, both of which failed to make money in their third return to the theatre. Two other shows making their third appearances were West Side Story and South Pacific, but unlike the other revivals, these were profitable, perhaps because of their positions late in the season, when shows traditionally do better business.⁴⁰

There were only two new musicals in 1969: How Now, Dow Jones and The Fantasticks.⁴¹ Although both shows were profitable for the theatre, it was the latter, a show unlike most of Casa Mañana's offerings, that was surprising. The Fantasticks, while one of the longest-running shows in history off-Broadway, had a cast of only eight, an orchestra of six, no singing or dancing ensemble, and no scenery. With a show of lesser appeal, these "shortcomings" might have been insurmountable, but The Fantasticks' strength lay in its simplicity. Based on Edmond Rostand's 1894 play,

³⁹ Ibid., September 7, 1969.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Max Shulman, How Now, Dow Jones, music by Elmer Bernstein, lyrics by Carolyn Leigh, 1968; Tom Jones, The Fantasticks, music by Harvey Schmidt, 1960.

The Romancers, the show told the story of a boy and a girl who fall in love after their fathers pretend enmity to bring them together.⁴² The show opened to a sell-out audience and despite the fact that it made only \$50,000, it was profitable, lacking the large payroll and production expense of most musicals.⁴³

The gross for the 1969 season was \$461,813, a figure \$6,000 better than the previous year. The figure made 1969 the second highest grossing season to date (1964 still held the all-time record). This figure is deceptive, however. The profit margin for the season was smaller than the two previous seasons, due mainly to the tremendous overhead of producing Hello, Sucker and the losses of several "old favorites."⁴⁴ In comments from patrons could be judged as an accurate barometer, the remarks written on the theatre's audience-balloting cards indicated a growing dissatisfaction, not with the shows that were being repeated, but with their too frequent repetition. According to a survey taken by Fort Worth Press amusements columnist, Jack Gordon, the predominant plea of patrons was not to repeat so many shows.⁴⁵ Star-Telegram columnist Elston Brooks, however,

⁴²National Council of Teachers of English, Guide to Play Selection, 3rd ed., 1975.

⁴³Fort Worth Press, August 24, 1969.

⁴⁴Fort Worth Star-Telegram, September 7, 1969.

⁴⁵Fort Worth Press, September 7, 1969.

remained skeptical of Casa Mañana's patron-balloting. He pointed out discrepancies, wide disagreement, and sometimes actual ignorance on the part of theatre-goers. One uninformed customer begged, "Please don't bring back Show Boat and Paint Your Wagon! I'm so SICK of the same Rodgers and Hammerstein glub every year!" Brooks pointed out that the pair did not write Show Boat, and in 1969, Paint Your Wagon had yet to play the round stage. The wide divergence in patron comments could be seen in the opposite tastes indicated on the cards. Some said, "Please, no more dated operettas," while others preferred only operetta. According to Brooks, many seemed only to want personal favorites repeated, requesting only one specific show or actor.⁴⁶

Summary of the Period

By 1967 Casa Mañana seemed to have recovered fully from the financial turmoil generated by the death of its founder, James Snowden, in 1964. In addition, it was regaining the stability it had lost in 1966 under a new director. For the next three years, the theatre made substantial profits, with 1967 and 1968 being surpassed only by the record-breaking 1964 season.⁴⁷ The period was one relatively free of the problems that were to characterize later seasons. Part of

⁴⁶Fort Worth Star-Telegram, October 26, 1969.

⁴⁷Ibid., September 8, 1968.

this was due to the staff of the theatre, which Melvin Dacus described midway through the period as "the most harmonious and creative we've ever had."⁴⁸ The three seasons further marked a period weighted heavily toward revivals, with only eight new shows making their appearance in three years. Not surprisingly, revivals were responsible for both the period's biggest successes as well as its worst losses. The Sound of Music in 1967 grossed \$72,450, but revivals of The King and I (1969), Kismet (1968), and The Music Man (1969) all lost substantially.⁴⁹

⁴⁸Fort Worth Press, September 8, 1968.

⁴⁹Financial Records, Casa Mañana Musicals, Fort Worth, Texas.

CHAPTER VII

1970-1973: CONTROVERSY RETURNS TO THE THEATRE

1970: A Season of New Shows

In 1970, in an attempt to better comply with patrons' wishes, Casa Mañana scheduled a season of entirely new shows. The plan, however, proved to be ill-advised, perhaps because the season lacked shows of "hit" potential. The result was the first losing season in Casa Mañana's twelve-year history.¹ In addition, Casa was hurt badly by a new dinner theatre, the Windmill, and its booking, in direct competition with Casa Mañana, of Ruta Lee.² A third factor cited by professional observers for the season's problems was the spiraling production costs of presenting musicals.³

As if to foreshadow the coming disaster, the Star-Telegram reported rumors in March of 1970 of a "tiff" between Casa Mañana officials and audience-favorite Ruta Lee, leaving doubts whether she would appear at the theatre in 1970. Reportedly, Miss Lee had requested to play the lead in Mame as her appearance that season, but officials wished her to open the season in I Do! I Do! The newspaper

¹Fort Worth Star-Telegram, February 1, 1979.

²Fort Worth Press, September 13, 1970.

³Fort Worth Star-Telegram, September 15, 1970.

reported that the Mame lead had been offered instead to Betty O'Neill, an actress married to Fort Worth businessman Charles Marshall.⁴ On March 31, theatre officials finally admitted that the rumors were indeed true: Ruta would not appear. The statement released to the press by Melvin Dacus, theatre manager, said, "There simply wasn't anything we felt Ruta would be right in--no show which would show her off properly."⁵ According to Miss Lee, however, she had been promised the Mame role the year before at the completion of Hello, Sucker. When theatre officials offered her the role in I Do! I Do!, Miss Lee's reply, she stated later, was, "I won't, I won't."⁶

In November of 1969, Casa Mañana had announced a national search for an original musical comedy script to open the 1970 season, hoping to duplicate its success with Hello, Sucker. However, if no qualified show could be found, a current Broadway show was to be substituted.⁷ By February of 1970, nearly twenty shows had been submitted, but the contest ended disappointingly for the theatre, since it was judged that those musicals entered would require too much rewriting or addition of music to justify the production expenditure. It was, therefore, finally decided to substitute a new Broadway

⁴ Fort Worth Star-Telegram, March 24, 1970.

⁵ Ibid., March 31, 1970.

⁶ Interview with Lee, July 10, 1980.

⁷ Dallas Morning News, November 22, 1969.

release, I Do, I Do, to open the 1970 season.⁸

On May 25th, I Do! I Do! officially opened what Casa Mañana officials hoped would be a record season.⁹ Unable to obtain the services of Ruta Lee, the play opened instead with Willi Burke and Jay Stuart in the lead roles. The opening proved to be disastrous, receiving strong criticism for directorial flaws. William A. Payne of the Dallas Morning News commented that the pacing of the show was so "frantic . . . that it tends to rob the whole of its sweetness." He referred to the overall production as "a misconception of the basic idea."¹⁰ Elston Brooks, who was generally kind to Casa Mañana's productions, largely echoed these criticisms, saying, ". . . when you're just dealing with two stars and one director there seems to be little excuse for the trio not coming up with a tighter, better-rehearsed show."¹¹ An incident from the show was to remain particularly vivid in Brooks' mind several years later. "The most natural thing in the world is to lose a line," Brooks commented, "but I took this actor to task because he turned to the audience and said, 'I don't know the line. Will someone give me the line?' At that moment he broke the whole spell."¹²

⁸Dallas Morning News, February 8, 1970.

⁹Tom Jones, I Do! I Do! music by Harvey Schmidt, 1966.

¹⁰Dallas Morning News, May 27, 1970.

¹¹Fort Worth Star-Telegram, May 26, 1970.

¹²Interview with Brooks, June 25, 1980.

From 1964 to 1980 Ruta Lee missed only two seasons at Casa Mañana, although during one of those seasons, 1970, she did play Fort Worth. That summer, after failing to reach an agreement with Casa Mañana, she received an offer from the Windmill Dinner Theatre, located only a short distance from Casa Mañana.¹³ On May 27th, only two nights after Casa Mañana had opened I Do! I Do!, Peter Pat, starring Ruta Lee and Judd Hirsch, opened at the Windmill. The show ran six weeks and in the words of critic Elston Brooks, "killed Casa Mañana at the box-office. . . . It was the one time that another theatre cut into Casa."¹⁴

Casa Mañana officials also gambled in 1970 by planning several musical plays back to back early in the season rather than interspersing them with musical comedies. I Do! I Do! was followed by Man of La Mancha, the musical version of Cervantes' classic novel, Don Quixote.¹⁵ Following Man of La Mancha was yet another musical dramatization, Take Me Along, based on Eugene O'Neill's Ah, Wilderness!¹⁶ Although Man of La Mancha received favorable reviews based largely on the "magnificent performance" of Joshua Hecht as Don Quixote and

¹³ Interview with Lee, July 10, 1980.

¹⁴ Interview with Brooks, June 25, 1980.

¹⁵ Dale Wasserman, Man of La Mancha, lyrics by Joe Darion, music by Mitch Leigh, 1965.

¹⁶ Joseph Stein and Robert Russell, Take Me Along, lyrics and music by Bob Merrill, 1959.

Cervantes, neither show was able to meet its production expenses and Take Me Along was the biggest money-loser of the season.¹⁷

As Casa Mañana prepared to open Sweet Charity in early July, once again the Windmill Dinner Theatre became a factor.¹⁸ Following the successful run of Peter Pat came Neil Simon's The Odd Couple starring popular Star-Telegram amusements editor, Elston Brooks. For the next five weeks, the Windmill once again played to capacity crowds while Casa Mañana registered only fair business.¹⁹ Ruta Lee reportedly hoped later in the year to co-star with Brooks in an engagement of Neil Simon's Last of the Red Hot Lovers, with the proceeds to be given away to some charity. Whenever she approached Star-Telegram officials with the proposal, however, she received a cold reception and the idea never came into being.²⁰ The explanation behind the refusal reflected perhaps how much Casa officials felt the Windmill plays had damaged their business that summer. According to Elston Brooks, the editor of the Star-Telegram was approached by a member of Casa Mañana's board. The board member complained

¹⁷ Fort Worth Star-Telegram, June 9, 1970.

¹⁸ Neil Simon, Sweet Charity, lyrics by Dorothy Fields, music by Cy Coleman.

¹⁹ Interview with Brooks, June 25, 1980.

²⁰ Interview with Lee, July 10, 1980.

to such an extent that Brooks was never allowed to appear in a play again that was in direct competition with Casa Mañana.²¹

Sweet Charity was one of only two profitable shows in 1970.²² Following it into the theatre were Little Me and George M, both of which, once again, failed to meet production expenses.²³ The structure of the theatre and the uneven sound system seemed to play a role in George M's failure. The show, which works as a showcase for the life and songs of George M. Cohan, could not overcome what was described as Casa's "structural difficulties." In addition, leading man Hal Holden was criticized for his lack of a strong voice needed for the role.²⁴

By the time Mame finally opened in mid-August, Casa Mañana's season was being described as "an austere summer with no bona fide 'hit'" by Star-Telegram columnist Perry Stewart.²⁵ Despite the fact that Mame received only the second opening-night ovation of the entire season, the Dallas

²¹ Interview with Brooks, June 25, 1980.

²² Fort Worth Press, September 13, 1970.

²³ Neil Simon, Little Me, lyrics by Carolyn Leigh, music by Cy Coleman, 1962; Michael Stewart, John Pascal, and Fran Pascal, George M! lyrics and music by George M. Cohan, 1968.

²⁴ Dallas Morning News, August 5, 1970.

²⁵ Fort Worth Star-Telegram, August 18, 1970. Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee, Mame, lyrics and music by Jerry Herman, 1966.

Morning News commented the show would not go down as "the blockbuster of all Mame's."²⁶ Earlier in the year the show had been at the center of a dispute between theatre officials and Ruta Lee. Despite the controversy, Mame proved to be the only true bright spot of the season, grossing \$71,181.²⁷ Betty O'Neill, who won the title role over Ruta Lee, had previously appeared at Casa Mañana in 1958's Call Me Madam and in 1961's Calamity Jane, before "retiring" to marry Fort Worth's Charles Marshall. She had previously performed Mame in Maine and had been so well-received that she was asked to stand by for Ann Miller on Broadway. When Miller sprained an ankle, Miss O'Neill had actually gone on in her place.²⁸

The 1970 season finally closed with what was described by the Dallas Morning News as an "experimental" production of Your Own Thing, an off-Broadway version of Shakespeare's Twelfth Night.²⁹ The show featured a Fort Worth native, Betty Buckley, who was to go on to star in several Broadway productions.

With only Mame and Sweet Charity showing profits, the 1970 season closed with a \$51,717 loss. This loss was

²⁶Dallas Morning News, August 19, 1970.

²⁷Fort Worth Press, September 13, 1970.

²⁸Fort Worth Star-Telegram, August 11, 1970.

²⁹Dallas Morning News, September 2, 1970. Donald Driver, Your Own Thing, lyrics and music by Hal Hester and Danny Apolinar, 1968.

attributed to the theatre's new policy based on its patron balloting, of scheduling only new shows rather than revivals.³⁰ In addition, the strong competition of the Windmill Dinner Theatre and its booking of Ruta Lee and Elston Brooks was a major influence on the season's final statistics.³¹

1971: Casa Mañana's Most Successful Season

At the first board meeting following the 1970 season, it was declared that the 1971 season would be a "make-or-break year" for Casa Mañana.³² It was decided that the theatre would return to a more traditional season, with only two new shows and six revivals. The two new shows, however, were both more widely known than most of the shows of the previous season. Both Hello, Dolly and Fiddler on the Roof were critical as well as popular successes and it was decided to place them in the opening and closing positions of the season.³³

Following the 1970 season Mel Dacus, Casa Mañana's general manager, had discussed this problem of a show's

³⁰ Fort Worth Star-Telegram, February 11, 1979.

³¹ Interview with Brooks, June 25, 1980.

³² Fort Worth Star-Telegram, September 29, 1970.

³³ Ibid., January 31, 1971. Michael Stewart, Hello, Dolly, lyrics and music by Jerry Herman, 1964; Joseph Stein, Fiddler on the Roof, lyrics by Sheldon Harnick, music by Jerry Bock, 1964.

audience-appeal. Speaking of 1970's disastrous all-new show season in an interview, he said, "We learned again that when we offer a good show which does not have a well-known name, the people just don't come out. Actually we already knew that; we have had similar experiences in other years, but we gave in to the cry of a small group for new shows."³⁴ In making the last statement, Dacus evidently made reference to the use of the patron balloting system. He cited as examples the 1970 season's well-known shows Mame and Man of La Mancha: both had done good business while the lesser-known shows all had lost badly.³⁵

Hello, Dolly was scheduled to open the 1971 season with a three-week run, and coaxed back to Casa Mañana in the title role was Ruta Lee. The theatre's officials sought, however, to protect themselves from a repeat of 1970 by adding a stipulation to Miss Lee's contract. By the terms of the agreement, she could not play any other Fort Worth production for ninety days either side of her Casa Mañana engagement.³⁶ The Windmill Dinner Theatre evidently had been hoping for another coup against Casa Mañana. Tom Eisner, Windmill president, had wanted Miss Lee for a play scheduled to run concurrently with Casa's opener of Hello, Dolly.³⁷

³⁴Dallas Morning News, September 19, 1970.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Fort Worth Star-Telegram, February 16, 1971.

³⁷Ibid.

Robert Ennis Turoff did not return in 1971 as Casa Mañana's director. Replacing him was Buff Shurr, who had previously directed a great part of the 1967 season when Turoff was forced to resign.³⁸ Part of the charm of Hello, Dolly in proscenium production is its lighted runway, carpeted staircase, real horse and trolley, and a locomotive. Shurr still managed to provide a trolley and locomotive, albeit carry-on pieces, for Casa Mañana's production. The set pieces were devised by Casa's designer, Joe I. Tompkins, but for the celebrated entrance down the staircase, Ruta Lee was carried down an aisle on the shoulders of the waiters.³⁹

Hello, Dolly was declared to be "the biggest hit musical . . . in years" at Casa Mañana, and Ruta Lee's performance in the title role was described as "14-carat."⁴⁰ Several critics pointed out that Dolly was one of the most difficult shows to present, even in proscenium, but the Dallas Morning News noted, "Casa's 'Dolly' came off with surprising success . . . due not only to Miss Lee's own skill as an entertainer, but also to the technical crew and the support of individually fine principals and singing and dancing ensembles."⁴¹ Hello, Dolly was such an unqualified success

³⁸Fort Worth Star-Telegram, March 24, 1967.

³⁹Ibid., May 25, 1971.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Dallas Morning News, June 9, 1971.

that despite its scheduled three-week run, an extra matinee had to be added.⁴²

Following the record-setting run of Hello, Dolly was a one-week engagement of Bye, Bye, Birdie, which had made its first appearance at the theatre in 1962. Then, with its next show Casa Mañana reached what William A. Payne described as ". . . a critical high-point" following what had already become a record run with Hello, Dolly. Payne praised the 1971 production of The Sound of Music, saying:

The current production . . . perhaps has no peer in the annals of the Fort Worth theatre. Certainly, its general excellence raises the staging to the level of the best that Casa has offered in the fifteen year history of the theatre. The excellence is an aggregate summation of singing, acting, staging, music.⁴³

If 1970 was a season of disappointments, 1971 seemed to build upon itself with each succeeding show. Both Perry Stewart and Elston Brooks of the Fort Worth Star-Telegram referred to Funny Girl, Casa Mañana's fourth show, as the best of the summer, after The Sound of Music.⁴⁴ Fanny Brice once again was portrayed by Linda Gerard, who had premiered the musical at the theatre in 1967. The show's relatively poor run was attributed to Bell Helicopter's two-week vacation period, which occurred during the show's engagement.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., June 23, 1971.

⁴⁴ Fort Worth Star-Telegram, July 6, 1971.

It was reported that one of every four tickets purchased at Casa Mañana was sold through Bell Helicopter's discount coupon plan.⁴⁵ Funny Girl was followed by Show Boat and Camelot, each making its third appearance at Casa Mañana, and by Oklahoma, being revived for the fourth time in thirteen seasons.⁴⁶

By the time Casa Mañana's run of Fiddler on the Roof began, the show was Broadway's longest-running musical, a record it was to hold for several years. Based on the stories of writer Sholem Aleichem, the musical told the story of a hard-working, devout Jewish family trying to survive persecution in tsarist Russia around 1900.⁴⁷ Ironically there were reservations expressed about the show's production by those who feared its theme would be too "ethnic." The fears proved baseless, however, when it became necessary to add a third week to the show's scheduled two-week run.⁴⁸ Starring in the Casa Mañana production was Seymour Penza as Tevye the milkman.⁴⁹

It is somehow ironic that one of Casa Mañana's most successful seasons should follow one of its most disastrous.

⁴⁵Dallas Morning News, September 19, 1971.

⁴⁶Production records, Casa Mañana Musicals, Fort Worth, Texas.

⁴⁷National Council of Teachers of English, Guide to Play Selection, 3rd ed., 1975, p. 170.

⁴⁸Fort Worth Star-Telegram, November 4, 1971.

⁴⁹Production records, Casa Mañana Musicals, Fort Worth, Texas.

The 1971 season closed with a box office gross of \$585,000, surpassing any previous season, including 1964.⁵⁰ The average attendance was 71.7 percent of capacity, with a final net profit of \$116,971.⁵¹ Other records set during the 1971 season included

- (1) The highest attendance for any season to date (188,000 patrons),
- (2) The longest season (seventeen weeks),
- (3) The largest single show gross, for Hello, Dolly (\$127,000), and
- (4) The largest single show attendance, for Hello, Dolly (three weeks of performances sold out).⁵²

1972: Casa Mañana Seeks to Improve Its Image

Following the close of the 1971 season the Casa Mañana board of directors authorized the conducting of "on the street" research in an effort to better meet the entertainment needs of the community. The resulting report, entitled "A Communications Proposal for Casa Mañana 1971," identified several problem areas. The answers most commonly received included

- (1) The general state of the economy,

⁵⁰Dallas Morning News, September 19, 1971.

⁵¹Fort Worth Star-Telegram, February 11, 1979.

⁵²Dallas Morning News, September 19, 1971.

- (2) The selection of productions unsatisfactory to some patrons,
- (3) Increased competition for leisure time in summer,
- (4) Lack of interest in attending theatrical productions.

The report went further to state that the 1971 slate of shows had been far inferior to the one chosen for the 1972 season. It was expected that this would cure some dissatisfaction. The chief point made by the proposal, however, was Casa Mañana's "loss of novelty after thirteen seasons," and it was concluded that the theatre "must provide a reason for attending, and the reason must appeal to a 'broad base.'"⁵³

The 1972 season did indeed appear promising. Of the eight shows chosen, four were entirely new to the theatre, including 1776, Anything Goes, Paint Your Wagon, and Porgy and Bess.⁵⁴ Of the remaining four, Carousel and The Student Prince had not been seen at the theatre since 1959, while both The Unsinkable Molly Brown and My Fair Lady were strong audience favorites. In addition, the closing of the Dallas Summer Musicals for the refurbishment of the State Fair Music

⁵³Casa Mañana Musicals, Inc., "A Communications Proposal for Casa Mañana, 1971," unpublished report, September, 1971.

⁵⁴Peter Stone, 1776, lyrics and music by Sherman Edwards, 1969; P. G. Wodehouse and Guy Bolton, Anything Goes, music and lyrics by Cole Porter; Alan Jay Lerner, Paint Your Wagon, lyrics by Lerner, music by Frederick Loewe, 1951; Dubose Heyward, Porgy and Bess, lyrics by Heyward and Ira Gershwin, music by George Gershwin, 1935.

Hall during the 1972 season furnished Casa Mañana with an extra impetus for success. Summer Musicals president Charles S. Sharp mailed out notices to season subscribers encouraging them to purchase season tickets from Casa Mañana.⁵⁵

A musical of particular interest during the 1972 season was the all-black production of Porgy and Bess. Black performers had appeared at Casa Mañana before, and in 1970 the resident ensemble had been integrated for the first time. The 1971 ensemble was not integrated, however, but the Fort Worth Star-Telegram reported that it was not due to a lack of black talent. Following the 1970 season, many white patrons had objected to the black ensemble members. While the newspaper made no judgment on how much public opinion influenced Casa Mañana's casting, it did note wryly that "if Casa is bending to these objections, it should make for some interesting casting in Showboat."⁵⁶

Porgy and Bess was a milestone for the theatre in several ways. Besides featuring an all-black cast, the show was also remarkable in that only nine actors were imported. The other forty-three supporting members of the cast were all from the Fort Worth-Dallas area.⁵⁷ In addition a director

⁵⁵Dallas Morning News, March 8, 1972.

⁵⁶Fort Worth Star-Telegram, April 13, 1971.

⁵⁷Ibid., August 27, 1972.

with an international reputation for interpretation of George Gershwin was hired by Casa Mañana to prepare the local production. Ellen Gerber had directed Porgy and Bess nineteen times in eight nations since 1958 and was considered by many the best director of the show in the world.⁵⁸

Porgy and Bess contains an astonishing twenty-seven songs and because of the demands this would place on the performers, two sets of actors alternated the title roles. Leonard Hayward and Phyllis Bash were featured in evening performances, while Robert Mosley and Janette Moody played all matinees.⁵⁹ Elston Brooks took special note of Leonard Hayward as Porgy, calling his performance "magnificent," and going on to say, "This is the first time you realize it has taken us all summer to get a quality leading man."⁶⁰ The show was the fourth highest grossing musical of the season and to meet the demand for tickets, five performances were added beyond its regular run.⁶¹

Labor Dispute Threatens to Close Casa Mañana

The 1972 season might have been an unremarkable season if it had not been for an incident during the season's fifth

⁵⁸ Ibid., August 25, 1972.

⁵⁹ Ibid., August 27, 1972.

⁶⁰ Ibid., August 29, 1972.

⁶¹ Ibid.

show, The Student Prince. The incident, although it could not be known at the time, was only the beginning of a major crisis that was to jeopardize severely the future of Casa Mañana.

In 1972 President of the United States Richard Nixon had ordered that a freeze should be placed on all wage and price increases exceeding 5-1/2 percent. The board of Casa Mañana decided that it would obey the President's directive despite a decision by Music Theatre Association, of which Casa was a member, to seek instead a 17 percent raise.⁶² Traditionally Casa Mañana had negotiated with Actors Equity through MTA, but its last three-year contract had expired in March of 1972. Casa's contention was that a non-profit civic enterprise in the Southwest should not be bound by a 17 percent raise which was based on living conditions in the East.⁶³

During the run of The Student Prince, a representative of Actors Equity Association, Willard Swire, was sent to Casa Mañana to discuss its refusal to exceed the wage and price guidelines. The board of directors declined to change its original decision, resulting in a brief strike by Equity members that closed the theatre for one performance.⁶⁴ One

⁶² Interview with Dacus, September 23, 1980.

⁶³ Fort Worth Star-Telegram, July 28, 1972.

⁶⁴ Interview with Dacus, September 23, 1980.

day later a compromise agreement with Actors Equity was announced. The board agreed to pay an additional 4.8 percent to the actors while Actors Equity agreed that ticket prices could remain the same through the end of the 1972 season.⁶⁵

Following the settlement, Casa Mañana withdrew from membership in the Music Theatre Association. It was felt that the disparity between what the theatre board could afford to pay and the figure the Association sought, a difference of 11 percent, was too great. General manager Melvin Dacus referred to the decision as a "victory for the theatre," since Casa Mañana could now negotiate individually with performers on the question of salaries.⁶⁶

The Wurlitzer Organ

In 1972, following the summer season, a forgotten symbol of another era in Fort Worth history found a new home at Casa Mañana. Earlier in the year, plans had been announced to raze the old Worth theatre, which had opened its doors on November 27, 1927. Playing at the opening of the theatre was a "Mighty Wurlitzer" organ, which by 1972 was one of only a few of its type remaining in the nation.⁶⁷ The old organ, still in excellent condition, had become synonymous

⁶⁵Fort Worth Star-Telegram, August 3, 1972.

⁶⁶Ibid., July 29, 1972.

⁶⁷"Casa, New Home of Worth Wurlitzer," Fort Worth Magazine XLVIII (August, 1972), 12-13.

with the Worth over the next forty years, along with its best known organist, Billy Muth. Muth had performed regularly on the Wurlitzer, giving concerts in between scheduled movies, as well as playing for acts which were occasionally booked into the theatre.⁶⁸ In 1972, however, the old organ was offered at auction and for a time it appeared it might be sold for its parts at a fraction of its worth. The organ was saved, however, through the timely intervention of F. Howard Walsh, a wealthy Fort Worth oil man and patron of the arts, who purchased the Wurlitzer for \$20,000.⁶⁹ Casa Mañana officials, evidently seeing the nostalgic value of the instrument, offered the theatre as the organ's new home and were accepted. In order to make room, Casa Mañana was forced to sacrifice sixteen of its seats, but on September 25, 1972, following several months of refurbishing, the "Mighty Wurlitzer" gave its first concert to an audience that included the widow of Billy Muth. Its first number in its new home was the theme song of the 1936 Casa Mañana, "The Night Is Young and You're So Beautiful."⁷⁰ The organ was continuing to entertain theatre patrons with a pre-show concert each evening through the 1980 summer season.

⁶⁸ Interview with Albert L. Jones, long-time Fort Worth resident, Fort Worth, Texas, February 10, 1981.

⁶⁹ "Casa, New Home of Worth Wurlitzer," pp. 12-13.

⁷⁰ Fort Worth Star-Telegram, September 26, 1972.

The 1973 Season: The Wage
Dispute Intensifies

During the fall of 1972, as plans were made for the 1973 season, the question was raised several times by Casa Mañana board members: "Could Casa Mañana operate as a non-Actors Equity theatre?" General manager Melvin Dacus was asked to explore the possibilities. The conclusion reached was that while finding directors, choreographers, and other professional staff personnel might be difficult, acting and ensemble roles could be filled from personnel in the colleges and universities in a five-state region.⁷¹

In December of 1972 Dacus was asked to present his findings to the board, including price figures showing both what it would cost to remain a union theatre and how much would be saved by operating with non-union actors. The difference for the entire season was a mere \$3,600. One of the members of the board, however, was, as described by Dacus, "extremely vehement." The member was quoted by Dacus as saying, "'I would rather close it [Casa Mañana] down and make a library out of it than accede to their wishes in this matter.'"⁷²

In February of 1973 Melvin Dacus was instructed by the board of directors to notify Actors Equity Association that

⁷¹Interview with Dacus, September 23, 1980.

⁷²Ibid.

Casa Mañana would operate as a non-union theatre for the 1973 season.⁷³ The minutes of the executive committee stated specifically as its reason for the action:

. . . the contract places Casa Mañana in an absolutely untenable economic position and the contract was not negotiated by us or a body representing us; and Actors Equity refuses to negotiate with us concerning wage scales in light of economic circumstances.⁷⁴

In March of 1973, as Melvin Dacus continued to gather performers and staff for a non-Equity season, it seemed for a while that agreement might be reached on wage demands. There still remained the final approval of Actors Equity and Casa Mañana on the deletion of a clause regarding the appearance at the theatre of non-Equity actors. Actors Equity took the position that all actors appearing at the theatre should be union members. Casa Mañana, however, maintained that the paragraph was illegal under the Texas Right to Work Law and agreed to sign the contract only if the paragraph was removed.⁷⁵

While the union membership clause at first seemed to be the only point separating the two parties, by March 14th the entire picture had clouded. Immediate past president of Casa Mañana Robert McCollum reported to the board that

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Minutes of Board of Directors, Casa Mañana Musicals, Fort Worth, Texas, February 6, 1973.

⁷⁵Ibid., March 5, 1973.

previously it had been thought an agreement on wages and the substance of the contract had been reached leaving, only the problem of union membership. McCollum reported, "We now find the union has quite a different view on wages."⁷⁶

Following the 1972 one-day strike, union officials had continued to maintain that Casa Mañana owed performers retroactive wages of \$4,200 covering the time that wages had been frozen while awaiting a ruling by President Nixon's Cost of Living Council. Actors Equity now said that it would waive its claim to this amount as well as the conflict over union membership. For these concessions, however, wages paid in 1973 and in 1974 would have to be substantially increased over what had been previously negotiated.⁷⁷

One day before Casa Mañana's scheduled opening, union officials came to Fort Worth once again to ask theatre officials to reconsider the decision to open a non-union season. The executive committee of the board decided, however, to abide by its original decision. The following evening as the opening night crowd began arriving, a group of union picketers led by such well-known actors as Werner Klemperer, Rip Torn, Geraldine Page, and Theodore Bikel descended upon the theatre.⁷⁸ The union's public campaign

⁷⁶ Ibid., March 14, 1973.

⁷⁷ Ibid., March 22, 1973.

⁷⁸ Interview with Dacus, September 23, 1980.

against Casa Mañana's decision had actually begun several weeks earlier, however, when on May 4 a large ad had appeared in local newspapers stating:

You may be certain that we will take every legal action and adopt every lawful means to put your theatre out of existence unless it pays actors the minimum wage they and the union struggled so hard to obtain.⁷⁹

The advertisements also contained photographs and quotations of former Casa Mañana performers who supported the union's demands. Some performers, however, reportedly called the theatre and apologized, saying their names had been used without permission.⁸⁰ Despite their demands for higher wages, the union picketers continued to maintain that the boycott was the only way to maintain a professional level of performance. About this claim Elston Brooks wrote:

The amateur tag was the most unfair and erroneous accusation Equity hung on Casa. Erroneous, but effective. . . . It was ridiculous on the surface. The actors were good enough to be paid money and that right there made them professionals, if not card carriers.⁸¹

Ironically, at least one of the actors that summer had formerly been a member of the union, but had given up his card.⁸² That same actor, Howard Hartman, starred as Emile DeBecque in the 1973 season's opening production of South

⁷⁹ Fort Worth Star-Telegram, May 4, 1973.

⁸⁰ Interview with Dacus, September 23, 1980.

⁸¹ Fort Worth Star-Telegram, July 6, 1973.

⁸² Ibid.

Pacific. Star-Telegram writer Perry Stewart said the theatre's first non-Equity musical "passed a crucial test . . . [it] was well-staged, well-acted and perhaps most significant of all--professional."⁸³ The other three shows of the season, Promises, Promises, Mame, and Cabaret were described by Melvin Dacus as "some of the best shows we have ever produced."⁸⁴ One of the shows, Promises, Promises, directed by Cecil Pickett, a teacher from the University of Houston, was placed by Elston Brooks on his list of the ten finest musicals seen at Casa Mañana during its first twenty-one seasons.⁸⁵

Nevertheless, by the time Mame reached the stage in late June, the boycott was having the desired effect. Many patrons, members of unions themselves, refused to cross the union picket lines, while still others perhaps feared that the shows were not of professional quality.⁸⁶ Finally at the board meeting held June 23, theatre official Robert McCollum read the following statement: "It is the intention of this Board to close the Casa Mañana summer season at the conclusion of Cabaret on July 14, 1973."⁸⁷ On Sunday following

⁸³ Fort Worth Star-Telegram, June 7, 1973.

⁸⁴ Interview with Dacus, September 23, 1980. Joe Masteroff, Cabaret, lyrics by Fred Ebb, music by John Kander, 1966.

⁸⁵ Fort Worth Star-Telegram, September 24, 1978.

⁸⁶ Interview with Dacus, September 23, 1980.

⁸⁷ Minutes of board of directors, Casa Mañana Musicals, June 23, 1973.

the closing of the theatre on Saturday, July 14, Melvin Dacus traveled to New York to meet once again with Actors Equity secretary Donald Grody. On Monday a tentative agreement between the union and Casa Mañana was finally reached, but the executive committee decided that the theatre would remain closed for the duration of the summer.⁸⁸ The reason given was mainly one of finances. The boycott and advertising campaign had cost Casa Mañana an estimated \$100,000 in lost revenues on its four-show season. Surprisingly, a few days before the closing, Robert McCollum, executive committee member and immediate past president of the theatre, had been quoted as saying that Casa Mañana might have closed anyway because for years it had been a "sick" theatre. This statement was met with opposition, however, from both management and labor, and another official of the theatre said the theatre was "as healthy as any civic theatre in the country."⁸⁹

Ironically, several days after Casa Mañana had closed its doors on July 14, Actors Equity continued to run the large advertisements it had bought in several local newspapers, a practice that prompted the Star-Telegram to ask, "What more does Actors Equity want? Blood?" The article

⁸⁸ Fort Worth Star-Telegram, July 17, 1973.

⁸⁹ Ibid., July 1, 1973.

went on to call the practice "a cold, cruel example of just where Equity stands in the sorrowful affair. . . ." ⁹⁰

The Boycott Aftermath Causes a Re-evaluation
of Long-standing Policies

While Casa Mañana officials waited for the final ratification of the tentative agreement reached previously with the union, the theatre's seventeenth season was already being discussed. A transition committee recommended to a meeting of the full membership of the board that Casa Mañana retain a sixteen-week summer season with six musicals and two non-musical shows. In addition it was recommended that other shows be added between the musicals and that some entertainment offering be planned for the spring of 1974. In another change from previous policy, the committee further recommended retaining name stars, cutting the length of runs, and improving the theatre's public relations program, which had been severely damaged by the boycott. ⁹¹

On October 23, 1973, the Equity boycott of Casa Mañana officially came to an end when word was received that the Actors Equity Council had ratified the tentative agreement reached earlier. ⁹² Among other terms of the agreement, Actors Equity (1) made concessions to the Texas right-to-work

⁹⁰ Ibid., July 18, 1973.

⁹¹ Ibid., July 21, 1973.

⁹² Ibid., October 24, 1973.

law; (2) agreed to the hiring on non-Equity performers who might apply; and (3) dropped the requirement that Casa Mañana conduct interviews for principal performers in New York City. By the same agreement Casa Mañana officials agreed to publicly state that there would be no recriminations against anyone who participated in the strike or picketing. In addition the minimum weekly scale paid to performers was to be raised from \$175.88 in 1973 to \$185.00 in 1974.⁹³

A few weeks after agreement had been signed, Casa Mañana announced several changes for the 1974 season, necessitated by the new labor contract with the union. Included were an increase in ticket prices by an average of 75¢ (the first such increase in four years) and plans to serve liquor at outdoor patios attached to the theatre. In addition, the theatre abandoned its plans to present some legitimate plays and returned to its original eight-musical season.⁹⁴

⁹³Tentative agreement between Casa Mañana Musicals and Actors Equity Association, July 16, 1973. From files of Casa Mañana Musicals, Fort Worth, Texas.

⁹⁴Fort Worth Star-Telegram, November 9, 1973.

CHAPTER VIII

1974-1978: ECONOMICS CATCH UP

WITH THE THEATRE

1974 Season: Changes in Policy

The 1973 boycott by Actors Equity was destined to have long-lasting effects on Casa Mañana. There were indications in 1974 that because of the change in the economic climate, Casa Mañana's board was beginning to reconsider some of its long-standing policies, including its previous devotion to the production of exclusively musicals and operettas. An indication of this was the choice of shows for the 1974 season. While the season still contained seven musicals, one show was a complete departure from previous seasons. The show, entitled This Was Burlesque, starred Ann Corio, "top banana" Jerry Lester, and featured several strip-tease artists and interspersed with traditional burlesque comedy sketches.¹ On opening night when exotic dancers Tami Roche, Jennifer Fox, and "the Fabulous Luna" bared all, several offended patrons walked out.²

¹This Was Burlesque program, 1974, Casa Mañana Musical, Fort Worth, Texas. Ann Corio, This Was Burlesque, 1962.

²Fort Worth Star-Telegram, July 31, 1974.

The remaining shows of the season were more traditional musicals. Four, including Fiddler on the Roof, A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum, Bells Are Ringing, and Gypsy, were revivals; while Sugar, Godspell, and No, No, Nanette were new to Casa Mañana.³ Despite good reviews and favorable comments by critics, Fiddler on the Roof averaged only 52 percent of capacity and the show following it, A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum, fared even worse. Reaching an audience capacity of less than 25 percent and grossing only \$27,500, the show became the worst box-office disaster in Casa Mañana's history.⁴

The dismal response to the season's first two shows elicited a bitter reaction from the theatre's staff, the press, and even some actors who had previously taken part in the 1973 boycott. Following the settlement of the dispute, the union had pledged to support the theatre through a publicity campaign and by enlisting name performers for Casa productions.⁵ This had been interpreted to mean that Actors Equity would buy advertising in support of the reopening

³Production records, Casa Mañana Musicals, Fort Worth, Texas. Peter Stone, Sugar, music by Jule Styne, lyrics by Bob Merrill; John-Michael Tebelak, Godspell, lyrics and music by Stephen Schwartz; Otto Harbach and Frank Mandel, No, No, Nanette, music by Vincent Youmans, lyrics by Irving Caesar and Harbach, 1925.

⁴Fort Worth Star-Telegram, June 15, 1974.

⁵Ibid., June 30, 1974.

of the theatre. In fact, however, the union had bought no advertising.⁶

There were rumors that Casa Mañana might be forced to close following Forum's run, but with the season's next two shows, Sugar and Godspell, business improved dramatically.⁷ Originally a two-week run of How Now, Dow Jones had been scheduled, but Godspell was moved up in the season in an attempt to capitalize on the success of Sugar.⁸ Godspell had been scheduled for only two weeks but received such an unprecedented response that Casa Mañana decided to bring it back for a second run within the same season. The show's combined earnings for three weeks were nearly \$114,000, far outdistancing the rest of the season, including This Was Burlesque.⁹ Starring Scott Jarvis as Jesus and Tip Kelley as Judas, the musical was a youth-oriented version of the book of Matthew.

The run of Godspell was somewhat of a phenomenon in Casa Mañana's 1974 season. Never before had the theatre revived a show within the same season, but the demand for tickets was so great that Godspell was revived not once, but twice. Following the regular season the show was

⁶ Ibid., June 14, 1979.

⁷ Dallas Morning News, August 11, 1974.

⁸ Fort Worth Star-Telegram, June 19, 1974.

⁹ Financial records, Casa Mañana Musicals, Fort Worth, Texas.

revived for five more performances.¹⁰ Evidently some patrons closely identified with Scott Jarvis in his role as Jesus. Jarvis was showered with gifts, including jewelry, crucifixes, clothing, and food. Some wanted to touch him, while others begged rings he had worn on stage for good luck. Many actually waited outside the theatre following performances, hoping to hear his comments on biblical themes. He was even invited to speak to the congregation of a local church.¹¹

Another indication of a change in the thinking of the board of directors became evident when Casa Mañana booked two well-known entertainers, Nanette Fabray and Gisele MacKenzie, to star in its productions of No, No, Nanette and Gypsy in 1974. An earlier indication of this had been given following the 1973 season when a committee appointed by the board had recommended retaining name stars.¹² The experiment, although only tentative, was a success. No, No, Nanette grossed \$50,531 in its one-week run despite the illness of Miss Fabray, which nearly kept her from appearing.¹³ Bolstered by Gisele MacKenzie's portrayal of Mama Rose, Gypsy grossed \$67,673, surpassing even the first run of Godspell.¹⁴

¹⁰ Fort Worth Star-Telegram, September 8, 1974.

¹¹ Ibid., September 12, 1974.

¹² Ibid., September 21, 1974.

¹³ Ibid., June 16, 1976.

¹⁴ Financial records, Casa Mañana Musicals.

Casa Mañana under New Management

On September 25, following the final close of the 1974 season, the board of directors announced that it had not renewed the contract of Casa's long-time producer-general manager Melvin Dacus. Leon Brachman, who had just been re-elected as the board's president, stated, "Our main purpose in removing Mel at this time was to separate the duties of producer and general manager."¹⁵ A more important reason, according to Dacus, was a change in the philosophy of the board following the 1973 strike. According to Dacus, "I'm sure . . . that my desires to use a lot of up and coming talent instead of going to the stars . . . plus the strike . . . led to my dismissal from the theatre."¹⁶

On November 26, 1974, the Casa Mañana board voted to hire C. E. "Bud" Franks as the new general manager of Casa Mañana.¹⁷ Franks had been born in Fort Worth of Air Force parents and had returned later as a member of Casa Mañana's ensemble. In addition to his credits as a performer, he had completed graduate studies toward his Ph.D. in theatre management and had been an associate producer of a dinner theatre chain. He also had managed dinner theatres in both Fort Worth and Ohio.

¹⁵Fort Worth Star-Telegram, October 8, 1974.

¹⁶Interview with Melvin Dacus, September 23, 1980.

¹⁷Minutes of Board of Directors, Casa Mañana Musicals, Fort Worth, Texas, November 26, 1974.

Although the board of directors was not convinced that the role of general manager and producer should be held by the same individual, Franks continued to function in both areas. Unlike Dacus, however, Franks did not become involved in public relations and ticket sales, concentrating rather on the internal management of the theatre and show production. One of the major problems Franks set about to correct upon accepting his new position was the improvement of Casa Mañana's damaged identity. "Through the years," according to Franks, "there was never any consistent campaign for public identity." The result of that, Franks continued, was ". . . a marvelous plant in a potentially lucrative area of the country for the support of live theatre, but no ability to do that because public awareness was not there."¹⁸

A New Format for the Theatre in 1975's Season

In 1975 it became evident that a change in policy and philosophy had indeed taken place at Casa Mañana. Bud Franks set about to increase public awareness of the theatre with the announcement that the season's musicals would feature several name entertainers. Opening the season was a revival of I Do! I Do!, starring Howard Keel and Patrice Munsel, followed by The Music Man, featuring Van Johnson. Hello, Dolly brought comedienne Martha Ray to Casa Mañana's

¹⁸ Interview with Bud Franks, general manager-producer, Casa Mañana Musicals, Fort Worth, Texas, August 14, 1980.

stage, while On a Clear Day You Can See Forever starred Gary Collins and Mary Ann Mobley. The last musical of the season was Irene, featuring Ruta Lee.¹⁹ An innovation in the 1975 season was the introduction of two one-week concerts with recording artists Roger Miller and Vicki Carr. Closing out the season was to be a three-week return engagement of This Was Burlesque, featuring Ann Corio and Pinky Lee.²⁰

Dallas Times Herald columnist Bob Porter took note of the change in policy at Casa Mañana, saying,

Over the first 17 seasons . . . the relationship between that summer musical theatre and star performers has been on the order of a sometimes . . . basis. The shows themselves have received the priority emphasis. . . . With spanking new management, the summer of '75 will be recorded as the season when Casa took plunge fully . . . embracing the star or name policy.²¹

Following the announcement of the 1975 season, sales of season tickets jumped, surpassing all previous records for past years. The weekly sales record toppled also. More season tickets were sold during one week than in any prior week in Casa Mañana's seventeen-year history. For the first time also the number of persons buying season tickets doubled.²²

¹⁹James Montgomery, Irene, lyrics by Joseph M. McCarthy, music by Harry Tierney, 1919.

²⁰Fort Worth Star-Telegram, April 13, 1975.

²¹Dallas Times Herald, May 28, 1975.

²²Fort Worth Star-Telegram, March 27, 1975.

Accompanying the announcement of the new season was the announcement of a new director. Jack Bunch had left home in Corsicana, Texas, at age sixteen to become a dancer in the Dallas Starlight Operettas under Charles Meeker. He had also been a lead dancer on Ed Sullivan's show and had served as a choreographer for Milton Berle's television show.²³ He has previously directed at several summer theatres as well as serving as director of summer musicals for Ohio's Kenley Circuit.²⁴

While the season in general received good reviews, Perry Stewart of the Star-Telegram noted a new and possibly dangerous trend:

. . . minor-role types which gave past Casa productions such a professional gloss are for the most part missing. In their place one is asked to accept a youthful, attractive and healthy chorus member. . . . Clearly it is cheaper than hiring an older actress for a single scene. And, clearly, it is a dangerous corner to cut.²⁵

Under Casa Mañana's new policies and management, the 1975 season showed a net profit of \$30,000. The theatre's outdoor cantina, which had been opened the year before, made an additional \$14,000 following a \$400 loss in 1974.²⁶ The most successful show of the season was This Was Burlesque,

²³Ibid., March 7, 1975.

²⁴Fort Worth Press, March 7, 1975.

²⁵Fort Worth Star-Telegram, June 1, 1975.

²⁶Ibid., October 1, 1975.

followed by Ruta Lee in Irene, and The Music Man, with Van Johnson. The experiment with one-week concerts also proved successful. Both Roger Miller and Vicki Carr averaged above 90 percent capacity for their runs.²⁷

The success of the one-week concerts encouraged the theatre's management to experiment further with what was billed as a "Second Season," in the fall of 1975. The second season, however, was not successful. A folk-music group, The New Christy Minstrels, was booked into the theatre for two nights but drew a total crowd of only 1,100 for both evenings.²⁸

Despite Good Attendance the 1976 Season Loses Money

In 1976, despite good attendance, Casa Mañana ended in red ink. The loss was attributed mainly to higher production costs and the salaries of the theatre's name stars. Two shows without stars, Jesus Christ, Superstar, and George M., were the most profitable, ironically because they did not feature well-known entertainers.²⁹

The season was once again heavy with stars, including Ruta Lee in Mame, Nanette Fabray in Applause, and Jo Ann

²⁷Financial Records, Casa Mañana Musicals, Fort Worth, Texas.

²⁸Fort Worth Star-Telegram, December 1, 1975.

²⁹Ibid., September 19, 1976. Jesus Christ, Superstar, lyrics by Tim Rice, music by Andrew L. Webber, 1971.

Worley in Anything Goes.³⁰ In addition, George Maharis was featured in Guys and Dolls, and Gary Collins and Mary Ann Mobley returned in Cabaret. Once again the theatre tried a one-week concert, this time with Jack Jones, although with more modest results than the previous season.³¹

Besides high production costs and high salaries, part of the blame for the losses in 1976 was placed on the system of choosing shows through patron balloting. The practice had been begun several years before, and despite new management and new board policies, it had never been discontinued. In an interview with theatre general manager Bud Franks, featured in the Waco News-Tribune, Franks commented on the system's weaknesses, noting, "Audience members vote in favor of seeing shows with which they are familiar, then stay away in droves."³² This is what happened again in 1976. In the case of Applause, which had been second in the balloting, the show lost money despite having Nanette Fabray as its star. Even Mame, featuring long-time Casa Mañana favorite Ruta Lee, managed only to break even.³³

³⁰Betty Comden and Adolph Green, Applause, lyrics by Lee Adams, music by Charles Strouse, 1970.

³¹Financial records, Casa Mañana Musicals, Fort Worth, Texas.

³²Waco News-Tribune, July 16, 1976.

³³Ibid.

1977: Another Season of Red Ink

In 1977, despite improved attendance figures, Casa Mañana posted a loss of \$74,000.³⁴ The theatre seemed to be vacillating somewhat, however, in its new devotion to the star system. Ruta Lee once again appeared, this time in Annie Get Your Gun, but only three other shows featured name entertainers of any recent prominence. Howard Keel was featured in Shenandoah to open the season, and later in the season Ken Berry appeared in Promises, Promises.³⁵ Both of these shows made a profit, but Gigi, with Jean Pierre Aumont, did not.³⁶ Another in the one-week concert series, this time featuring Florence Henderson, also made a profit despite the actress-singer's \$25,000 salary. The concerts, first introduced in 1975, had generally proved profitable due chiefly to the theatre's low overhead on such productions.³⁷

Casa Mañana revived Show Boat in 1977 in celebration of that show's fiftieth anniversary. To star in the show the theatre brought back Nolan Van Way, an actor who had been very popular with Fort Worth audiences in previous seasons.

³⁴Fort Worth Star-Telegram, December 8, 1977.

³⁵James Lee Barrett, Shenandoah, music by Gary Geld, lyrics by Peter Udell, 1975.

³⁶Alan Jay Lerner, Gigi, music by Frederick Loewe, 1958.

³⁷Fort Worth Star-Telegram, October 12, 1977.

Show Boat proved to be the only other show of the season to make a profit, a rather remarkable fact considering its age. For the production the theatre staff constructed a fifty-foot long replica of a vintage riverboat. The working cut-out stood three stories high and had to be built outside the theatre in sections and then reassembled inside the dome.³⁸

Show Boat was one of the few bright spots in the 1977 season, however, and even before the season closed Casa Mañana found itself obliged to call upon several local business firms who had pledged limited underwriting. It marked the first time in the theatre's twenty-year history that these pledges had actually been called upon.³⁹ With the help of these pledges and several profitable shows toward the end of the season, Casa Mañana was able to remain open, but in December of 1977 the theatre's board of directors asked the Fort Worth City Council to waive \$50,000 in overdue rental payments from 1976 and 1977. For several years the theatre had paid the city a percentage of its gross revenues, but following the 1971 record season a \$30,000 ceiling had been instituted. Three years later following the labor troubles of 1972-73, this ceiling had been lowered to

³⁸ Ibid., August 6, 1977.

³⁹ Ibid., October 12, 1977.

\$25,000.⁴⁰ It was felt, however, that this still was too much when the theatre was experiencing such heavy losses, and the board requested that Casa Mañana be placed back on a percentage basis.⁴¹

Another reason for requesting a change, according to Bud Franks, was the deterioration of Casa Mañana's physical plant. Over the years, Casa Mañana had made numerous improvements to the physical plant beyond the corporation's rental obligations, including the paving of the parking lot, the addition of a scene shop, concession stands, and an outdoor cantina.⁴² It was felt by some that the city had not reciprocated these improvements with the proper maintenance. According to Franks, "We were not getting a thing back for our money." By 1977, the building was, in Franks' words, "in a state of dilapidation."⁴³ Several aluminum "temporary" buildings were being used to provide office space, and the theatre's boilers and twenty-year-old air-conditioning system were in danger of collapse. The celebrated red seats, once the objects of a successful fund-raising and publicity campaign, were also in need of replacement or refurbishing.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Ibid., March 16, 1979.

⁴¹ Interview with Franks, August 14, 1980.

⁴² Interview with Dacus, September 23, 1980.

⁴³ Interview with Franks, August 14, 1980.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

The 1978 Season: Declining Attendance
and Spiraling Expenses

In 1978 Casa Mañana was able to do better than in 1977, once again losing \$75,000 and averaging only 62 percent of capacity. Casa Mañana was not the only local theatre experiencing severe financial difficulties, however. In the same season, the Dallas Summer Musicals lost \$120,000.⁴⁵ Casa Mañana's season included revivals of Damn Yankees, starring Van Johnson, Call Me Madam, with Ruta Lee, and The Sound of Music, featuring Anna Maria Alberghetti. The Sound of Music was responsible for the largest pre-show sale of tickets in the theatre's twenty-one year history and played to near-capacity crowds for two weeks, necessitating an additional performance.⁴⁶ Its success was not matched by the other shows featuring name entertainers. The previous season, actor-dancer Ken Berry had been extremely popular with local audiences in Promises, Promises, but his appearance in Where's Charley? in 1978 led to numerous complaints from patrons after Berry announced he would not dance following a fall during rehearsals that left him with a sprained ankle. Many people seemed to doubt his integrity and as a result the show lost money.⁴⁷ Other shows of the

⁴⁵ Fort Worth Star-Telegram, February 1, 1979.

⁴⁶ Ibid., July 23, 1978.

⁴⁷ Ibid., February 2, 1979.

season were Paint Your Wagon, featuring local country and western personalities, and Dames at Sea, a musical that parodied the Busby Berkeley movies of the 1930s and featured the dancing of Fort Worthian Bruce Lea.⁴⁸

The incident with Ken Berry seemed in one sense to be the harbinger of a growing disillusionment among Casa Mañana's board of directors with the merits of the star system. One of its drawbacks, mentioned in a meeting following the close of the 1978 season, was the difficulty it posed in setting the season early in the year. This in turn caused the pre-season sales campaign to run far behind schedule. In addition it was noted that the stars Casa Mañana could afford were seldom current top-billers such as those hired by the Dallas Summer Musicals. As a result, the decision was reached to abandon the star system in 1979 and to concentrate instead on the quality productions for which Casa Mañana had long been noted.⁴⁹

There was another more ominous decision reached at the same board meeting. Despite generally good productions during the 1978 season, the public support to which Casa Mañana had long been accustomed was missing. As a result,

⁴⁸ Production records, Casa Mañana Musicals, Fort Worth, Texas. George Haimsohn and Robin Miller, Dames at Sea, music by Jim Wise, 1968.

⁴⁹ Minutes of the board of directors, Casa Mañana Musicals, Fort Worth, Texas, October 17, 1979.

for the first time in its history, Casa decided to mount a major underwriting campaign to raise the \$300,000 deemed necessary for the 1979 season. If that amount could not be raised, it was announced, plans for the 1979 season would be abandoned.⁵⁰

From 1973 to 1978 Casa Mañana produced only two profitable seasons. In 1974 the theatre made \$28,528, and in 1975 it showed a profit of \$20,186.⁵¹ Although there were many factors involved, the continuing effects of the strike cannot be denied. As many as seven years later, in 1980, Casa Mañana staff members were encountering former customers who had never returned to the theatre, believing a labor dispute still existed. Some patrons, remembering the picket lines of 1973, even expressed animosity toward actors in current productions.⁵²

Current Casa producer C. E. "Bud" Franks, Jr., feels that in 1972-73, when Casa Mañana began to face severe labor problems over wages, economics in a very real sense had finally caught up with the theatre. Through the years the ticket structure at Casa had remained very low in comparison with other theatres around the country. By comparison, the wage increases asked by the union were not that unreasonable.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Fort Worth Star-Telegram, February 11, 1979.

⁵² Interview with Franks, August 14, 1980.

In refusing to negotiate with Actors Equity, Casa Mañana, in the words of Franks, "broke the back of continuity and support this theatre had down through the years and we've been fighting that ever since."⁵³

⁵³Ibid.

CHAPTER IX

1979-1980: CASA MAÑANA SEEKS NEW DIRECTIONS

The 1979 Fund Drive

Although Casa Mañana has never had underwriting in the conventional sense, it has always depended heavily on different corporate discount plans in ticket sales to serve the same purpose. Most theatres similar to Casa Mañana depend on this rather than on the sale of season tickets.¹ In order to raise the \$300,000 deemed necessary to mount the 1979 season, it was decided to undertake the most massive corporate sales campaign in Casa Mañana's twenty-one-year history. In opening the sales campaign Casa Mañana president Loyd Turner commented,

We are the only city-owned stock theatre in the nation that doesn't have underwriting and I consider it a minor miracle that the theatre is still here, but we have chosen not to go the underwriting route. We want the corporations to get value received--tickets, not donations.²

The inauguration of the sales campaign caused theatre general manager Bud Franks to comment, "One of the biggest mistakes of this theatre has been trying to exist without bothering the community for money. We're an art form and

¹Interview with Franks, August 14, 1980.

²Fort Worth Star-Telegram, February 2, 1979.

we need support." Franks went on to point out, however, that one reason for Casa Mañana's financial problems was its failure to "tell our story the year round."³

Although the corporate sales drive began hopefully, by March with only \$225,000 raised, the effort was termed a failure. Of 185 firms approached, only 50 had agreed to purchase tickets or even to make pledges or donations. Many firms approached said their employees had no interest in "that sort of thing," while others cited poor business or company policies against such practices.⁴ On March 12, the executive committee of the Casa Mañana board met and recommended that because of a lack of community support, Casa Mañana not continue with its plans for a 1979 season.⁵

Once before, in 1964, it had appeared that Casa Mañana might be forced to close because of indebtedness, following the death of its founder James Snowden. At that time, the theatre had ultimately been saved, not by the business community, but by a grass-roots effort that went to the people of the community. In 1979 when it appeared that Casa Mañana would definitely close, the same thing occurred. The grass-roots appeal was led by two local businessmen, Wayne Rogers

³Ibid., February 11, 1979.

⁴Ibid., March 2, 1979.

⁵Minutes of the board of directors, Casa Mañana Musicals, Fort Worth, Texas, March 12, 1979.

and Joe Brown. In the forty-eight hours following the announcement that Casa Mañana would have to close, the two had raised nearly \$5,000.⁶ The response encouraged the Casa Mañana board to extend the deadline for the theatre's final closing to April 1. After that, officials explained, it would be too late in the year to successfully mount a season.⁷

As word of the fund drive spread, the Fort Worth Star-Telegram began to run a column each day entitled "Save Casa Now," showing how much money was still left to be raised.⁸ The money itself came from many sources. Many contributors sent donations with notes that expressed their feelings about the closing of Casa Mañana. One wrote, "Fort Worth cannot afford to display to the public the failure of a fine theatre to the performing arts especially at a time when the community is in such a rate of growth."⁹ Other fund-raising techniques were unique. One enterprising local disc jockey offered a ticket from the 1937 Casa Mañana for auction and eventually raised \$475.00.¹⁰ A variety show held in Casa Mañana and featuring such local performers as

⁶Fort Worth Star-Telegram, March 29, 1979.

⁷Ibid., March 31, 1979.

⁸Ibid., various issues, March, 1979.

⁹Ibid., March 25, 1979.

¹⁰Ibid., March 31, 1979.

Don Edwards, Chisai Childs, Jo Ann Miller, and dancer Bruce Lea raised additional funds.¹¹ By the April 1st deadline, not only had the necessary \$75,000 been raised, but an additional \$21,000 had been pledged.¹²

Although the \$300,000 goal necessary to keep Casa Mañana operating for the 1979 season was reached, it was the barest minimum necessary for the summer. The season's uncertainty and delay had also hurt ticket sales, and with little time left before the opening of the season, another campaign was started to raise the necessary working capital through the sale of season tickets and corporate discount coupons.¹³ In addition, the board of directors of Casa Mañana announced the formation of a blue-ribbon panel to study the problems, direction, and long-range future of the theatre.¹⁴ The members of the panel were prominent local business leaders including Leon H. Brachman, Chairman; James F. Atkins, president of Bell Helicopter; E. Blake Byrne, president of KXAS Television; Joseph M. Grant, president of Fort Worth National Bank; and William G. Marquadt, president of Texas Electric Service Company.¹⁵

¹¹ Ibid., March 28, 1979.

¹² Ibid., April 2, 1979.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., April 3, 1979.

¹⁵ Ibid., May 9, 1979.

As the blue ribbon panel was opening its investigation, the 1979 season began. The season once again featured six revivals including Fiddler on the Roof, Here It Is Burlesque, The King and I, and Godspell, all running for two weeks. The other four shows of the season, West Side Story, South Pacific, An Evening with Pat Boone, and Same Time, Next Year, each ran for only one week. The only concessions to name stars during the season, besides the one-week concert by Pat Boone, was the appearance of television star Don Grady in Godspell and Ruta Lee's annual performance. Following the conclusion of the musical season, Ruta Lee returned in a one-week production of a legitimate play, Same Time, Next Year.¹⁶

The season appeared to be riding the wave of enthusiasm generated during the earlier fund-raising drive. In a sales report given to the board early in the season, Casa Mañana was showing a profit of \$20,000. The third appearance of Burlesque had played initially to small houses but was a virtual sell-out by the end of its two-week run.¹⁷ As the season continued, only two shows, The King and I and Godspell, failed to meet expenses, and the season ended with a gross of \$796,000, compared to only \$666,000 in 1978. The

¹⁶Production Records, Casa Mañana Musicals, Fort Worth, Texas. Bernard Slade, Same Time, Next Year, 1978.

¹⁷Minutes of the board of directors, Casa Mañana Musicals, Fort Worth, Texas, July 17, 1979.

overall average attendance had also improved to 72 percent, and the season ended with a small profit of \$10,000.¹⁸

Following the 1979 season, Star-Telegram reporters Perry Stewart and Elston Brooks conducted their own investigation into the operations of several theatres around the country similar to Casa Mañana. Included in the study were The Muny Theatre, St. Louis; Melody Top, Milwaukee; and Goodspeed Opera House in East Haddam, Connecticut. A common factor in the success of these theatres, the article concluded, was a high percentage of advance season ticket subscriptions, with some selling as much as 45 percent of their seats before the season's opening. Casa Mañana, it was noted, sold only about 10 percent.¹⁹

Meanwhile, in recognition of the lack of season ticket sales and other problems which had nearly forced Casa Mañana's closing in April, the blue ribbon committee appointed by the board of directors had completed its work. The panel recommended that an outside marketing research firm be hired to study the corporate and financial structure of Casa Mañana along with the theatre's production and image problems. The recommendations of the committee were accepted by the board and a local marketing research firm, Moore Diversified Services, was hired to make the study.

¹⁸ Ibid., September 24, 1979.

¹⁹ Fort Worth Star-Telegram, September 23, 1979.

Several members of the board donated \$3,000 each to raise the \$30,000 necessary to fund the study.²⁰

The Findings of the Marketing Survey
Are Presented

In November of 1979 the completed report by Moore Diversified Services was presented to the board of Casa Mañana. The report, entitled "Casa Mañana Musicals, Inc., Strategies for the 1980's," consisted of a summary of the findings of the study along with recommendations of needed changes in the theatre's structure and format. In conducting its research MDS had visited several theatres it considered comparable to Casa Mañana around the United States, including Melody Top, Milwaukee; Music Circus, Sacramento; Cape Cod Melody Tent, Hyannis, Massachusetts; South Shore Music Circus, Cohasset, Maine; and the Dallas Summer Musicals. Other methods of research employed during the study included interviews with 5,000 Casa Mañana patrons during the 1979 season, 400 additional interviews of citizens selected randomly from the general population, and 20 "key-person" interviews with business and community leaders. In addition, an investigation and audit of Casa Mañana's existing operations were conducted.²¹

²⁰ Interview with Loyd L. Turner, president, Casa Mañana Musicals, 1979-80, Fort Worth, Texas, August 11, 1980.

²¹ Moore Diversified Services, "Casa Mañana Musicals, Inc., Strategies for the 1980's," November, 1979, p. i.

The results of the research identified several major problem areas, including marketing, publicity and advertising, theatre economics, production format and mix, internal management, and the board of directors.²²

Marketing, Publicity, and Advertising

The MDS study found that due to a lack of staffing, there was inadequate effort in the area of marketing, publicity, and advertising. The survey further concluded that there was not enough structured emphasis placed on this area by the board of directors and therefore recommended the hiring of both a business operations director and a marketing development director. The business operations director would oversee all business operations on a continuous basis and thus free the general manager to perform strategic planning and to become more visible with patrons and the business community. The marketing development director would be in charge of developing and executing a structured sales and marketing program.²³

Theatre Economics

The MDS report considered a common theory among summer stock theatre operations that two-week production runs allow a theatre to spread or amortize production costs over more performances, thus achieving significant economies of scale

²²Ibid., p. iii.

²³Ibid., p. 7-3.

for a given performance. The MDS report concluded that the risks of attracting the additional audiences needed for a two-week run were excessive in most cases for a theatre the size of Casa Mañana.²⁴ It therefore recommended that Casa Mañana consider two-week runs only when informed input and judgment indicated only a minimal risk. MDS further felt that the maximum number of two-week runs within a given season should be no more than two or three, with two-week runs and one-week runs being sequenced to minimize quality and production problems.²⁵

Production Format and Mix

The chief complaints among patrons and other citizens surveyed were two problems that Casa Mañana had long battled: too many revivals of old shows and the lack of new material being produced by Broadway.²⁶ In its survey of similar theatres, MDS discovered that most surmounted these problems through heavy use of "star packages" for one-week runs.²⁷ Specifically, it was recommended that a varied-season format be developed consisting of not only traditional musicals but also concerts and plays.²⁸

²⁴ Ibid., p. 1-1.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 1-5.

²⁶ Ibid., p. iii.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 1-2.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 1-5.

Internal Management and Organization

The MDS report concluded that some of Casa Mañana's major problems were a direct result of two things: the internal structure of the organization and the lack of operating latitude accorded management by the board. MDS recommended a restructuring of the organization (see diagram, p. 227) and further suggested that management be given "reasonable operating latitude."²⁹

The Board of Directors

Former Casa Mañana board president Loyd L. Turner described the theatre board of directors in 1979 as "too many chiefs and not enough Indians."³⁰ The findings of the MDS survey agreed with this assessment, noting that the board was too large, tended to become too involved in some daily operations, and lacked specific policies for management.³¹ The report specifically recommended that policy and decision-making should be entrusted to the executive committee and that neither the general board nor the executive committee should be involved in day-to-day operating details or decisions. MDS further recommended that

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Interview with Turner, August 12, 1980.

³¹ Moore Diversified Services, p. 6-1.

specific policies should be formulated to cover the rewarding and/or replacement of staff personnel.³²

Summary of the Marketing Survey by MDS

MDS reached the conclusion that in comparison to other theatres on a national basis, Casa Mañana had one of the best physical facilities available. It recommended, however, the setting of long-range goals for its improvement, including extensive refurbishing and remodeling and the addition of 200-700 additional seats.³³ For the 1980 season MDS recommended the implementation of a nine-point program:

1. More emphasis on one week productions.
2. More consideration of one-night "star" concerts.
3. Modest ticket price increases and an innovative coupon plan.
4. Restructured publicity and advertising campaign.
5. Creation of a sales-marketing-business development function.
6. Modified Board functions.
7. Restructure of Casa Mañana's internal management.
8. A balanced 1980 budget.
9. Short term underwriting protection.³⁴

The 1980 Season

In 1980 there were several changes in Casa Mañana's internal operations that reflected the advice of the marketing survey completed in November of 1979. Chief among these changes, according to 1980 board president Loyd L. Turner, was the new business-like attitude being taken by

³²Ibid., p. 6-2.

³³Ibid., pp. iii and A-1.

³⁴Ibid., p. 10-2.

the theatre's board of directors. Beginning in 1980, instead of monthly meetings of Casa Mañana's full board, only the executive committee met, except on a quarterly basis. This in effect improved the corporate structure of Casa Mañana and gave general manager-producer Bud Franks the necessary latitude to run the theatre's day-to-day operations. The producer further was placed on a new incentive contract.³⁵

There was also another more subtle change in the board of directors. Board position had long been considered merely "prestige" positions to which patrons were appointed. Beginning in 1980, however, prospective board members were interviewed extensively before appointment for their business abilities that could aid the theatre in a positive way. It was announced that those board members who did not show a positive contribution within six months would be asked to resign their positions.³⁶

The most obvious change in Casa Mañana's operations, however, was reflected in the format and "mix" of the 1980 season. Bud Franks flatly referred to both 1980 as well as 1979 as "seasons of experimentation."³⁷ Although there were no one-night "star" concerts interspersed between musicals

³⁵ Interview with Turner, August 12, 1980.

³⁶ Interview with Jim Moore, president, Moore Diversified Services, Fort Worth, Texas, August 9, 1980.

³⁷ Interview with Franks, August 14, 1980.

as the MDS survey had recommended, there was an increased number of one-week star concerts.³⁸ Appearing in 1980's season were Debbie Reynolds, Chita Rivera and Frank Gorshin, and Vicki Carr. All of the concerts were placed early in the season at a time when attendance traditionally is slow, but of the four only Debbie Reynolds was truly profitable. Miss Reynolds became the highest grossing one-week show in Casa Mañana's history and also gave the theatre its most successful season opener in twenty-two years.³⁹ Both of the other concerts lost money, causing general manager Bud Franks to conclude that audiences probably would prefer to see a musical earlier in the summer rather than waiting until July.⁴⁰ Still, the fact that the ensemble and orchestra did not go on the payroll until that date reduced Casa Mañana's usual overhead.⁴¹

The effect of the MDS survey could further be seen in the wide variety of entertainment appearing in the 1980 season. Besides the three star concerts, there was also a legitimate play, California Suite, with Tom Poston; and the Louisiana Hayride, for devotees of country and western

³⁸ Interview with Moore, August 9, 1980.

³⁹ Fort Worth Star-Telegram, July 13, 1980.

⁴⁰ Interview with Franks, August 14, 1980.

⁴¹ Fort Worth Star-Telegram, July 13, 1980.

music.⁴² The first musical of the season did not appear until July, and appropriately it was The Unsinkable Molly Brown, featuring Ruta Lee. Miss Lee announced that it would be her final appearance in what had become her trademark role, since the show had nearly disappeared from the seasons of most theatres and was considered woefully old-fashioned by most critics.⁴³ The other musicals of the season included revivals of Oklahoma and Man of La Mancha along with the premiere appearances of Chicago, Grease, and The Wiz.⁴⁴ The latter shows were all considered experimental and consequently ran for only one week each. As sometimes happens in theatre, Grease became the unexpected sleeper hit of the season. The musical had become Broadway's longest-running show in 1980, and yet it was scheduled for only a one-week run because it was largely unknown as a play until Hollywood made it into a movie in 1978, starring John Travolta and Olivia Newton-John.⁴⁵

⁴² Neil Simon, California Suite, 1977; The Louisiana Hayride is one of the oldest and most successful shows of country music in the United States. It originated in the 1940s in Shreveport, Louisiana, and became known as the "cradle of the stars," since several of its participants, including Hank Williams and Johnny Horton, moved on to stardom with the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville, Tennessee. Patrick Carr, ed., The Illustrated History of Country Music (New York, 1979).

⁴³ Fort Worth Star-Telegram, July 12, 1980.

⁴⁴ Fred Ebb and Bob Fosse, Chicago, music by John Kander, lyrics by Ebb, 1975; Jim Jacobs and Warren Casey, Grease, 1972; William Brown, The Wiz, music and lyrics by Charlie Smalls, 1975.

⁴⁵ Grease program, Casa Mañana Musicals, 1980.

As the 1980 season came to a close, the Casa Mañana staff and board pointed proudly to the fact that most of the MDS survey's nine priority areas had been improved or were in the process of change. More emphasis had been placed on one-week productions and a greater variety of entertainment. In addition, a major restructuring of the theatre's board of directors and a revision of the corporation's by-laws had taken place. The internal structure of the theatre's management was being modified through the addition of a marketing development director and a business manager to free the general manager from such duties.⁴⁶ While other changes were still to come, as Casa Mañana entered a new decade there was a feeling of optimism that the theatre could survive and indeed thrive.

Conclusion: The Future

In the period 1958-1980 Casa Mañana Musicals has gone through many changes. When it opened in 1958, it held a unique place in the theatre world as the only permanent theatre in the round built for the production of musicals. Perhaps because of its experimental nature and the fact that most similar theatres were housed in tents, Casa Mañana was at first scoffed at by some, who perhaps felt the concept was of no more than passing interest. With each successive season, however, Casa Mañana steadily built a solid reputation

⁴⁶ Interview with Franks, August 14, 1980.

through its artistic and often innovative productions of both musicals and operettas. By the mid-1960s it was also becoming known as a theatre willing to experiment, through its productions of such untried musicals as Calamity Jane and Hello, Sucker. Casa Mañana through its first twelve seasons was consistently profitable, proving that a civic theatre need not depend on the star system in order to remain successful. It was not until the early 1970s, when a sagging national economy and labor disputes began plaguing the theatre, that Casa Mañana finally began to lose its previous support. During this period, because of this gradual loss of its traditional audiences and increased competition from other entertainment sources, the theatre also experienced a period of decline following a disastrous labor dispute in 1973. Since that time, in seeking to attract a broader base of the population, Casa Mañana has reorganized its internal structure and has tried to build a concentrated program of season ticket sales. In the process, it has been forced to abandon many of its long-held beliefs and policies, depending on a wider variety of entertainment offerings and more use of name talent to attract the general public. Through this reorganization and revision of philosophy, the theatre hopes ultimately to depend on its box office for 50 percent or less of its gross profits,

with season tickets, corporate coupons, and limited underwriting making up the deficit.⁴⁷

Loyd L. Turner, 1980 board president, was very hopeful following the 1980 season that the changes taking place in Casa Mañana would enable it to survive in a rapidly growing community. With the continued expansion of the Fort Worth-Dallas Metroplex and the revitalization of the downtown Fort Worth area, Turner predicted, "Fort Worth's growth is on the verge of an explosion. We are going to be in much better shape after this season [1980]. My successor will have a much easier time."⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Interview with Moore, August 9, 1980.

⁴⁸ Interview with Turner, August 11, 1980.

APPENDIX A

A SUMMARY OF CASA MAÑANA SEASONS

1958-1980

A SUMMARY OF CASA MAÑANA SEASONS
1958-1980*

<u>Production Title</u>	<u>Principals</u>
<u>1958 Season</u>	
<u>Can-Can</u>	Deedy Irwin, Dick Smart
<u>Carousel</u>	Frances Wyatt, Henry Michel
<u>The Pajama Game</u>	Joan Mann, Mace Barrett, Colee Worth
<u>The Merry Widow</u>	Beverly Sills, Jim Hawthorne
<u>Call Me Madam</u>	Betty O'Neill, Dick Smart
	Season Gross Total \$ Not available
<u>1959 Season (Winter)</u>	
<u>Oklahoma!</u>	Joan Hovis, James Hurst
<u>Brigadoon</u>	Christine Matthews, John Reardon
<u>Guys and Dolls</u>	Betty Oakes, Mace Barrett
	Season Gross Total \$109,426.57
<u>1959 Season</u>	
<u>Wonderful Town</u>	Betty O'Neill, Jacquelyn McKeever
<u>Silk Stockings</u>	Virginia Martin, Mace Barrett
<u>Where's Charley?</u>	Will B. Able, Carla Huston
<u>The King and I</u>	Christina Lind, William Chapman
<u>The Student Prince</u>	Joy Clements, Jim Hawthorn
<u>Annie, Get Your Gun</u>	Deedy Irwin, George Wallace, Jack Rutherford
	Season Gross Total \$273,666.98

* Taken from production records of Casa Mañana Musicals, including Casa Mañana Scrapbooks, vols. 1-38, 1957-1980.

<u>Production Title</u>	<u>Principals</u>
<u>1960 Season</u>	
<u>Gentlemen Prefer Blondes</u>	Emmaline Henry, Charles Barlow
<u>Kismet</u>	Elaine Malbin, Mace Barrett
<u>Bells Are Ringing</u>	Pamela Britton, John Smith
<u>Rosalinda</u>	Ralph Herbert, Lucille Smith
<u>Kiss Me Kate</u>	William Chapman, Lucille Smith
<u>Li'l Abner</u>	John Craig, Willi Burke
<u>South Pacific</u>	Betty Jane Watson, Walter Cassel
	Season Gross Total \$384,344.65
<u>1960 Winter Season</u>	
<u>The Women</u>	Lorraine Day, Sheree North, Marguerite Chapman
<u>Mr. Roberts</u>	Ralph Meeker, Eddie Bracken, Frank McHugh
<u>1961 Spring Season</u>	
<u>The Solid Gold Cadillac</u>	Martha Raye, Lewis Prentiss
<u>Operation Mad Ball</u>	Sal Mineo, Judy Carrol
<u>Make a Million</u>	Jack Carson, Joy Harmon
<u>Marriage-Go-Round</u>	Constance Bennett, Hugh Marlowe, Anna-Lisa
	Season Gross Total \$57,714.04

<u>Production Title</u>	<u>Principals</u>
	<u>1961 Season</u>
<u>Calamity Jane</u>	Betty O'Neill, Danny Scholl
<u>The Pajama Game</u>	Patricia Murand, Jack Drummond
<u>The Wizard of Oz</u>	Judith McCauley, Will B. Able
<u>The Music Man</u>	Mace Barrett, Lee Green, Mort Marshall
<u>Texas Li'l Darlin'</u>	Don Wilson, Jet McDonald
<u>Show Boat</u>	Nolan Vay Way, Jean Sanders, Judith McCauley, Leonard Hayward
<u>Saludos de Mexico</u>	
	Season Gross Total \$386,976.33

	<u>1961 Winter Season</u>
<u>Father of the Bride</u>	Joe E. Brown, Anita Bayless, Harriet Melendy
<u>Take Me for an Angel</u>	Kay Sutton, Larry Douglas, Roxanne Arlen, Johnny Silver
	Season Gross Total - Not Available

	<u>1962 Season</u>
<u>The Desert Song</u>	Nolan Van Way, Linda Loftis
<u>Peter Pan</u>	Claiborne Cary, Robert Eckles
<u>Bye-Bye Birdie</u>	Jack Naughton, Renee Lee
<u>Fanny</u>	Joshua Hecht, Richard Wentworth, Jomarie Ward, Richard Armbruster
<u>High Button Shoes</u>	Tim Herbert, Jacqueline James
<u>Damn Yankees</u>	Jim Tushar, Margery Beddow

<u>Production Title</u>	<u>Principals</u>
<u>1962 Season (Continued)</u>	
<u>Flower Drum Song</u>	Yau Shan Tung, Aluin Ing, Tim Herbert, Diane Williams
Season Gross Total \$385,595.36	
<u>1963 Season</u>	
<u>Song of Norway</u>	Nolan Van Way, Barbara Williams
<u>Gypsy</u>	Natalie di Silvio, Evelyn Brooks
<u>Cinderella</u>	Linda Loftis, Lester Freed
<u>Wildcat</u>	Karen Morrow, Stewart Rose
<u>The Vagabond King</u>	Mace Barrett, Leigh Green
<u>The Merry Widow</u>	Eileen Schauler, James Gannon
<u>West Side Story</u>	Stanley Grover, Marcia King, Luba Lisa, Bryan Da Silva, Richard France
Season Gross Total \$369,698.27	
<u>1964 Season</u>	
<u>The Sound of Music</u>	Joan Weldon, Richard Torigi
<u>Irma La Douce</u>	Wisa D'Orso, Don Chastain
<u>Mr. President</u>	Art Lund, Peggy King
<u>The Unsinkable Molly Brown</u>	Ruta Lee, Richard Fredericks
<u>Finian's Rainbow</u>	Clarence Nordstrom, Stanley Grover
<u>Oklahoma!</u>	Linda Bennett, James Hurst
<u>My Fair Lady</u>	Leland Howard, Karen Shepherd, John Cecil Holm, William Griffis
Season Gross Total \$479,132.00	

<u>Production Title</u>	<u>Principals</u>
<u>1965 Season</u>	
<u>South Pacific</u>	Ruta Lee, Richard Torigi
<u>The Most Happy Fella</u>	Norman Atkins, Carolyn Maye, James Hurst
<u>The Music Man</u>	Ted Scott, Nancy Leighton, Erwin Swint
<u>Roberta</u>	Linda Loftis, Chett Sommers
<u>Camelot</u>	Ted Scott, Jan Moody, Don Stewart
<u>110^o in the Shade</u>	Mace Barrett, Donna Sanders
<u>A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum</u>	Jack Harrold, Loney Lewis
<u>The King and I</u>	Mace Barrett, Willi Burke
Season Gross Total \$443,516.00	
<u>1966 Season</u>	
<u>How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying</u>	Garold Gardner, Natalie di Silvio, Edwin Steffe
<u>Show Boat</u>	Nolan Van Way, Judith McCauley
<u>Guys and Dolls</u>	Wayne Tucker, Donna Sanders
<u>Li'l Abner</u>	Gary Oakes, Nancy Leighton, Joe E. Marks
<u>What Makes Sammy Run?</u>	Richard France, Judith Hastings
<u>Flower Drum Song</u>	Hal Watters, Virginia Wing, Bryan da Silva, Pat Turner
<u>Once Upon a Mattress</u>	Art Ostrin, Joan Kibrig
<u>West Side Story</u>	Don McKay, Dorothy Emmerson, Richard France, Pat Turner
Season Gross Total \$397,525.00	

<u>Production Title</u>	<u>Principals</u>
<u>1967 Season</u>	
<u>Unsinkable Molly Brown</u>	Ruta Lee, James Hurst
<u>On a Clear Day You Can See Forever</u>	Rita Gardner, Mace Barrett
<u>Oliver</u>	Ted Scott, Joyce O'Neill, Ned Van Zandt, Gregg Weir
<u>Can-Can</u>	Roberta McDonald, Ted Scott
<u>The Sound of Music</u>	Willi Burke, Erik Silyu
<u>The Desert Song</u>	Richard Fredericks, Janet Pavek
<u>Funny Girl</u>	Linda Gerard, Mitchell Gregg
<u>My Fair Lady</u>	Karen Shephard, Leland Howard, Boris Aplon, John Cecil Holm
	Season Gross Total \$459,200.00
<u>1968 Season</u>	
<u>Annie Get Your Gun</u>	Ruta Lee, James Hurst
<u>Half a Sixpence</u>	Hal Holden, Linda Rae Hager
<u>Kismet</u>	Paul Ukena, Constance Moffitt
<u>Oklahoma!</u>	Gary Oakes, Joy Franz, Betty Lynn Buckley, Robert Windsor
<u>A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum</u>	Jack Harrold, Colee Worth
<u>Gypsy</u>	Roberta McDonald, Joy Garrett
<u>Camelot</u>	Jon Cypher, Linda Bennett, James Hurst
<u>Walking Happy</u>	William Linton, Luce Ennis
	Season Gross Total \$455,106.00

<u>Production Title</u>	<u>Principals</u>
	<u>1969 Season</u>
<u>Hello, Sucker</u>	Ruta Lee, Mace Barrett
<u>The Music Man</u>	Mace Barrett, Joy Franz
<u>The King and I</u>	Norwood Smith, Luce Ennis
<u>How Now, Dow Jones</u>	Gary Oakes, Joy Garrett
<u>Naughty Marietta</u>	Richard Fredericks, Marie Santell, R. G. Webb
<u>West Side Story</u>	Harry Danner, Victoria Mallory, Carmen Morales, Richard Williams
<u>South Pacific</u>	Patti Karr, Howard Hartman
<u>The Fantasticks</u>	Jack Drummond, Victoria Mallory, Jerry Wyatt, R. G. Webb
	Season Gross Total \$461,813.00
	<u>1970 Season</u>
<u>I Do! I Do!</u>	Willi Burke, Jay Stuart
<u>Man of La Mancha</u>	Joshua Hecht, Marilyn Child, Bob Gorman
<u>Take Me Along</u>	Bill McCutcheon, Luce Ennis
<u>Sweet Charity</u>	Patti Karr, Will McKenzie
<u>Little Me</u>	Travis Hudson, Paul Wallace
<u>George M.</u>	Hal Holden, Laura McDuggie
<u>Mame</u>	Betty O'Neill, Joe Walker, Karen Peeler, Jack Drummond
<u>Your Own Thing</u>	David Britton, Betty Buckley
	Season Gross Total \$338,339.00

<u>Production Title</u>	<u>Principals</u>
<u>1971 Season</u>	
<u>Hello, Dolly</u>	Ruta Lee, George Blackwell, Worth Howe, Bruce Lea
<u>Bye Bye Birdie</u>	Richard Barclay, Isabelle Farrell
<u>Sound of Music</u>	Judith McCauley, Mitchell Gregg
<u>Funny Girl</u>	Linda Gerard, Mitchell Gregg
<u>Show Boat</u>	Ken Corday, Jeanne Rogers, Katy Dacus
<u>Camelot</u>	Jamie Ross, Catherine Christensen, Ken Corday
<u>Oklahoma!</u>	Gary Oakes, Linda Peters
<u>Fiddler on the Roof</u>	Seymour Penza, Ziona Balaban
	Season Gross Total \$585,304.00
<u>1972 Season</u>	
<u>1776</u>	Wayne Sherwood, Lloyd Harris, Rayford Shelton
<u>Carousel</u>	Nolan Van Way, Linda Peters
<u>Anything Goes</u>	Buzz Halliday, Jered Holmes, Frank Vohs
<u>The Unsinkable Molly Brown</u>	Ruta Lee, Seth Riggs
<u>The Student Prince</u>	Jon Garrison, Janie Shook, Mel Dacus
<u>Paint Your Wagon</u>	Paul Ukena, Gayle Schultz, Joe Masiell
<u>My Fair Lady</u>	Willi Burke, Ian Sullivan
<u>Porgy and Bess</u>	Leonard Hayward, Phyllis Bash, Eugene Edwards
	Season Gross Total \$502,508.00

<u>Production Title</u>	<u>Principals</u>
<u>1973 Season</u>	
<u>South Pacific</u>	Howard Hartman, Sharon Garrison
<u>Promises, Promises</u>	Brent Spiner, Linda Daughtery
<u>Mame</u>	Sylvia Froman, Paul Porter, Judy Sherry, Betty Cox
<u>Cabaret</u>	Brad Maule, Linda Daughtery
Season Gross Total \$181,667.00	

<u>1974 Season</u>	
<u>Fiddler on the Roof</u>	Seymour Penza, Penny Robbins
<u>A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum</u>	Jack Harrold, Woody Romoff, James Gassett
<u>Sugar</u>	Joy Garrett, Scott Jarvis, Joey Evans
<u>Godspell</u>	Scott Jarvis, Tip Kelley
<u>Bells Are Ringing</u>	Ruta Lee, Scot Stewart
<u>This Was Burlesque</u>	Ann Corio, Jerry Lester
<u>No, No, Nanette</u>	Nanette Fabray, Richard Barclay, Robert Nichols
<u>Gypsy</u>	Gisele MacKenzie, Jeannie Wilson
Season Gross Total \$560,800.00	

<u>1975 Season</u>	
<u>I Do! I Do!</u>	Howard Keel, Patrice Munsel
Roger Miller Special	
<u>The Music Man</u>	Van Johnson, Linda Michele

<u>Production Title</u>	<u>Principals</u>
	<u>1975 Season (Continued)</u>
<u>Hello, Dolly</u>	Martha Raye, Jack Ritschel
<u>On a Clear Day You Can See Forever</u>	Mary Ann Mobley, Gary Collins
<u>Irene</u>	Ruta Lee, Russell Arms, Jason Hamilton
Vicki Carr Special	
<u>1975 Burlesque</u>	Ann Corio, Pinky Lee
	Season Gross Total \$714,072.00
	<u>1976 Season</u>
<u>Mame</u>	Ruta Lee, Douglas Easley, Jeanine Ann Cole
<u>Applause</u>	Nanette Fabray, George Ball, Sharon Garrison
<u>George M.</u>	Bruce Lea, Voight Kempson, Robin Stephens
<u>Anything Goes</u>	Rene Sweeney, Roger Perry, Anthony Teague
<u>Guys and Dolls</u>	George Maharis, Linda Michele
<u>Cabaret</u>	Mary Ann Mobley, Gary Collins
The Jack Jones Show	
<u>Jesus Christ, Superstar</u>	Robert Corff, Thomas Young, Judy Kaye
	Season Gross Total \$721,689.00
	<u>1977 Season</u>
<u>Shenandoah</u>	Howard Keel, Deborah Combs

<u>Production Title</u>	<u>Principals</u>
	<u>1977 Season (Continued)</u>
<u>My Fair Lady</u>	Linda Michele, Michael Evans, Ben Wrigley, Byron Webster
<u>Gigi</u>	Jean-Pierre Aumont, Deborah Combs
<u>Brigadoon</u>	Gary Oakes, Claire Brooks, David Cooper, David Britton
<u>Show Boat</u>	Nolan Van Way, Linda Michele
<u>Promises, Promises</u>	Ken Berry, Brenda Thomson
Florence Henderson Special	
<u>Annie Get Your Gun</u>	Ruta Lee, Scot Stewart
	Season Gross Total \$753,568.00
	<u>1978 Season</u>
<u>Where's Charley?</u>	Ken Berry, Brenda Thomson
<u>Call Me Madam</u>	Ruta Lee, Francesco Sorianello, Bruce Lea, Gay Kruger
<u>Damn Yankees</u>	Van Johnson, Linda Kaye Henning
<u>Paint Your Wagon</u>	John Hickman, Buddy Crutchfield, Gay Kruger
<u>Sound of Music</u>	Anna Maria Alberghetti, David Holliday
<u>Pippin</u>	Thomas Young, Cameron Smith
<u>Dames at Sea</u>	Bruce Lea, Virginia Seidel, Frances Lea
	Season Gross Total \$666,590.00

<u>Production Title</u>	<u>Principals</u>
<u>1979 Season</u>	
<u>Fiddler on the Roof</u>	Mel Dacus, Katy Dacus
<u>Here It Is--Burlesque</u>	Ann Corio
<u>The King and I</u>	Mace Barrett, Lainie Nelson
<u>West Side Story</u>	Allan Gruet, Sarah Harwell, Bruce Lea, Cress Darwin Gillian Scalici
<u>South Pacific</u>	Ruta Lee, Ron Husmann
An Evening with Pat Boone	
<u>Godspell</u>	Don Grady, Tip Kelley
<u>Same Time, Next Year</u>	Ruta Lee, Dennis Robertson
Season Gross Total \$796,262.00	
<u>1980 Season</u>	
Debbie Reynolds' Show	
<u>California Suite</u>	Tom Poston, Jeanine Ann Cole
Chita Rivera and Frank Gershin	
An Evening with Vicki Carr	
<u>The Louisiana Hayride</u>	
<u>Unsinkable Molly Brown</u>	Ruth Lee, Richard Fredericks
<u>Man of La Mancha</u>	Ron Husmann, Darryl Ferrera, Carolyn Marlow
<u>Oklahoma!</u>	Gary Oakes, Jan Lacey

<u>Production Title</u>	<u>Principals</u>
	<u>1980 Season (Continued)</u>
<u>Grease</u>	Shelby Grimm, Wendy Jackson
<u>Chicago</u>	Penny Worth, Carolyn Kirsch, William McCauley
<u>The Wiz</u>	Deborah Malone, Thomas Young, Forrest Gardner, Weyman Thompson, Ron Taylor, Joanne Jackson
	Season Gross Total -\$106,281.00*

* Gross figures not available.

APPENDIX B

BYLAWS OF CASA MAÑANA MUSICALS, INC.

Newly Revised 1980

BYLAWS OF CASA MAÑANA MUSICALS, INC.

Newly Revised 1980

ARTICLE I

NAME, PURPOSE, AND OFFICE

Section 1:1. Name. The name of this non-profit corporation is CASA MAÑANA MUSICALS, INC. (the "Corporation").

Section 1:2. Purpose. The Purpose for which the Corporation has been formed is to in general further the cultural development of the City of Fort Worth and its inhabitants, and in particular to present musical and other theatrical and cultural productions, and to provide facilities for the education and training of young artists in these fields of endeavor.

Section 1:3. Principal Office. The principal office of the Corporation shall be located in the City of Fort Worth at such address as from time to time may be designated by the Board of Directors.

Section 1:4. Registered Office and Agent. The Corporation shall have and continuously maintain in the City of Fort Worth a registered office and a registered agent whose office is identical to such registered office. The registered office may, but need not, be identical to the Corporation's principal office, and the address of the registered office may be changed from time to time by the Board of Directors.

ARTICLE II

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Section 2:1. Powers and Duties. The Board of Directors shall have the power and authority to manage and control all of the affairs of the Corporation and shall make all major policy decisions. For this purpose, decisions involving monetary matters shall be deemed to be "major" if they involved \$5,000 or more.

Section 2:2. Number, Term, and Manner of Selection. The Board of Directors shall consist of 45 members. The length of term for each Director shall be fixed so that one-third of the members of the Board of Directors shall have their terms expire each year.

At the annual meeting of the Board of Directors on the last Monday in September the members of the Board of Directors shall elect 15 Directors to serve for a three-year term beginning on the first day of October, and by this procedure there shall be a rotation of the Board of Directors with one-third of the members being elected each year on a self-sustaining basis. Prior to each annual meeting of the Board of Directors the Nominating Committee shall meet and determine names of persons to be recommended as new members of the Board of Directors. In this connection the Board of Directors may elect all of the persons recommended to them by the Nominating Committee or they may delete some or all of the persons recommended by the Nominating Committee and elect other persons of their own choosing. The Mayor of the City of Fort Worth shall be automatically nominated and elected to the Board of Directors and shall serve thereon so long as he holds the Mayor's Office. During his or her tenure, the Mayor shall serve as honorary Chairman of the Board. The number of consecutive terms a Director may be eligible to serve shall be limited to two full terms with a waiting period of at least one year before said Director is eligible to serve again.

Section 2:3. Annual Meeting and Quarterly Meetings. The Board of Directors shall meet annually in Fort Worth on the last Monday of September at a place designated by the Board of Directors for the meeting to elect officers of the Corporation and members of the Board of Directors and to conduct such other business as may properly come before it. The Board of Directors shall also meet quarterly on the last Monday of January, the last Monday of March, and the last Monday of June, to conduct such business as may properly come before it. The President of the Corporation shall preside at all meetings of the Board of Directors.

Section 2:4. Special Meetings. The President or any ten members of the Board of Directors may call a special meeting of the Board of Directors at any time by mailing notice of such meeting at least five (5) days before the date of said meeting to all Directors at the addresses shown on the Corporation's books advising them of the time and place thereof. Also, special meetings of the Board of Directors may be held at any time by waiver of notice of such meeting signed by such Directors.

Section 2:5. Quorum. At all such meetings, the Directors present shall constitute a quorum, and any action taken by the majority of those present shall be considered to be the action of the Board of Directors.

Section 2:6. Removal. Any Director of the Corporation may be removed by the Board of Directors whenever in its judgment the best interests of the Corporation would be served thereby. Any Director who fails to attend at least two of the Board's four regularly scheduled meetings each fiscal year shall automatically be deemed removed.

Section 2:7. Vacancies. Any vacancy occurring in the Board of Directors by death, removal, incapacity, or resignation prior to the appointment of the Nominating Committee shall be filled by the President with the approval of the Executive Committee.

Section 2:8. Compensation. Directors may not receive any salaries for their services, but by resolution of the Board of Directors a director may be reimbursed for out-of-pocket expenses incurred by such director in carrying out his or her duties as a director. However, nothing herein contains shall be construed to preclude a director from serving the Corporation in another capacity and receiving compensation therefor.

Section 2:9. Informal Action Taken by Directors. Any action which may or must be taken at a meeting of Directors may be taken without a meeting if a consent in writing, setting forth the action so taken, is signed by all of the directors.

Section 2:10. Liability of Directors in Certain Cases. A Director shall not be liable for such Director's acts as such if he or she is excused from liability under the Texas Non-Profit Corporation Act; and, in addition, to the fullest extent permitted by such Act, each Director (and also each officer) shall, in the discharge of any duty imposed or power conferred upon such Director by the Corporation, be fully protected if, in the exercise of ordinary care, such Director acted in good faith and reliance upon the written opinion of an attorney for the Corporation, the books of account or reports made to the Corporation by any of its officials, or by any independent certified public accountant, or by an appraiser selected with reasonable care by the Board of Directors, or in reliance upon other records of the Corporation.

ARTICLE III

COMMITTEES

Section 3:1. Executive Committee. There shall be an Executive Committee of the Board of Directors which shall consist of all officers of the Corporation and the immediate past president.

A. Powers and Duties. The Executive Committee shall have the power to perform all the functions of the Board of Directors between the meetings of the Board of Directors. The Executive Committee shall make a quarterly report to the Board of Directors, either in writing or at a meeting of the Board, of all of its actions for the approval of the Board of Directors.

B. Meetings. The Executive Committee shall meet monthly at such time and place as is provided by written or telephone notice given by the President of the Corporation at least 48 hours prior to the scheduled time of the meeting. The Executive Committee shall fix its own rules or procedures for the conduct of its meetings.

C. Quorum. One-fourth of the members of the Executive Committee shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business at all meetings of the Executive Committee, and the act of a majority at a meeting at which a quorum is present shall be the act of the Executive Committee.

D. Minutes. The Secretary of the Corporation shall keep regular minutes of the proceedings of the Executive Committee and shall report them to the Board of Directors.

E. Vacancies or Removals. The President of the Corporation is authorized to appoint alternate members of the Executive Committee to serve in the temporary or permanent absence or disability of any member of the Executive Committee, and in such event such alternate shall serve until the absent member returns; or if a permanent vacancy or disability of a member of the Executive Committee occurs, and an alternate is chosen, then such alternate shall serve until the term of the person he or she replaces has expired and until his or her successor is chosen and qualified. Any member of the Executive Committee who fails to attend at least half of the Committee's regularly scheduled meetings each year shall automatically be deemed removed.

Section 3:2. Nominating Committee. The President of the Corporation shall appoint the new Nominating Committee by July 31 of each year, such Committee to consist of not fewer than three and not more than five members of the Board of Directors (who are not also members of the Executive Committee). The President shall appoint one of the members to be chairperson of the Committee.

A. Duties. After July 31 of each year but before the annual meeting of the Board of Directors to be held on the last Monday of September, the new Nominating Committee

shall meet and prepare recommendations to be given to the Board of Directors prior to the annual meeting date of the names of persons recommended to become members of the Board of Directors and of the names of persons recommended to become officers of the Corporation. In this connection the Board of Directors may elect all of the persons recommended to them by the Nominating Committee to be directors or officers, or they may delete some or all of the persons recommended by the Nominating Committee and elect other persons of their own choosing.

B. Quorum. One-half of the members of the Nominating Committee shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business at all meetings of the Nominating Committee, and the act of a majority at a meeting at which a quorum is present shall be the act of the Nominating Committee.

C. Vacancies or Removals. The President of the Corporation is authorized to appoint alternate members of the Nominating Committee to serve in the temporary or permanent absence or disability of any member of the Nominating Committee, and in such event such alternate shall serve until the absent member returns; or if a permanent vacancy or disability of a member of the Nominating Committee occurs, and an alternate is chosen, then such alternate shall serve until the term of the person he or she replaces has expired and until his or her successor is chosen and qualified.

Section 3:3. Specific Committees. In addition to the Executive Committee and the Nominating Committee, the Corporation shall have the following specific committees of the Board of Directors: Personnel Committee, Budget and Finance Committee, Playhouse Committee, Production Committee, and Sales Committee. The Board of Directors shall by resolution determine, or shall by resolution delegate, in whole or in part, the power to so determine, the memberships, the powers and duties, the time and place of meetings, and any and all other features of the above committees.

Section 3:4. General Committees. By resolution adopted by the Board of Directors, the Board of Directors may designate other committees of directors, each committee consisting of one or more persons, no more than one-half of whom need be Directors. To the extent provided in the Articles of Incorporation, these Bylaws, and such resolution, each such committee shall have the authority of the Board of Directors in the management of the Corporation. Other committees not having and exercising the authority of the Board of Directors in the management of the Corporation may be designated and appointed by a resolution adopted by the Board of Directors.

ARTICLE IV

OFFICERS

Section 4:1. Number and Title. The officers of this corporation shall consist of a President, Senior Vice President, Vice President/Budget and Finance, Vice President/Playhouse, Vice President/Production, Vice President/Sales and Promotion, Producer/General Manager, Secretary, and Treasurer, all of whom shall be elected by the Board of Directors at its annual meeting.

Section 4:2. Election and Term of Office. All officers shall be elected for a term of one (1) year beginning on the first day of October. In case of failure to hold elections as directed in these Bylaws, all incumbents of positions shall hold over until their successors have been elected.

Section 4:3. Removal. Any officer elected by the Board of Directors may be removed by the Board of Directors for just cause.

Section 4:4. Vacancies. Any vacancy occurring in any of the offices of the Corporation by death, removal, incapacity, or resignation shall be filled by the Board of Directors.

Section 4:5. President. The President shall be the principal executive officer of the Corporation and shall in general supervise and control all of the business and affairs of the Corporation. The President shall preside at all meetings of the Board of Directors and the Executive Committee, and in general the President shall perform all duties incident to the office of the President and such other duties as may be prescribed by the Executive Committee. The President shall be an ex-officio member (without the power to vote) of all of the Corporation's committees.

Section 4:6. Senior Vice President. The Senior Vice President shall head the Personnel Committee and preside over meetings of that committee. He or she shall conduct board meetings and Executive Committee meetings in the absence of the President. He or she shall endeavor to understand the functions of the other Vice Presidents and the structure of the Corporation's internal management and operations, and he or she shall engage in long-range planning for the operations and the physical plant of the Corporation.

Section 4:7. Vice President/Budget and Finance. The Vice President/Budget and Finance shall provide advice and

guidance to the Corporation's professional staff on budgeting, cash flow, forecasting, and cash management. He or she shall head the Budget and Finance Committee and preside at meetings of that committee, and he or she shall be available to co-sign checks in the absence of the Treasurer.

Section 4:8. Vice President/Playhouse. The Vice President/Playhouse shall provide assistance to the Playhouse by way of aiding in the organization and utilization of the support group. He or she shall be available to help in the presentation of grant applications. He or she shall act as a liaison between the Playhouse and the public schools in the Fort Worth area, and he or she shall head the Playhouse Committee and preside at meetings of that committee.

Section 4:9. Vice President/Production. The Vice President/Production shall aid the Producer/General Manager in the selection of productions to be presented at the theatre. He or she shall head the Production Committee and preside at meetings of that committee.

Section 4:10. Vice President/Sales and Promotion. The Vice President/Sales and Promotion shall assist the Sales/Marketing Director in organizing the Sales Committee and the Board of Directors to lend support in the various sales campaigns of the theatre. He or she shall head the Sales Committee and preside at meetings of that committee.

Section 4:11. Producer/General Manager. The Producer/General Manager shall be responsible for the day-to-day operations of the Corporation and may make minor policy decisions jointly with the President and the Executive Committee. For this purpose, decisions involving monetary matters shall be deemed to be "minor" if they involve less than \$5,000.

Section 4:12. Treasurer. The Treasurer shall serve on the Budget and Finance Committee which shall provide the staff of the Corporation with advice and guidance on budgeting, cash flow, forecasting, and cash management. He or she shall co-sign all expense checks exceeding \$1,000.

Section 4:13. Secretary. The Secretary shall take minutes of all Board meetings and Executive Committee meetings and shall perform all the duties of a corporate secretary as set forth in the Texas Business Corporation Act.

ARTICLE V

CONTRACTS, CHECKS, DEPOSITS, AND FUNDS

Section 5:1. Contracts. The Executive Committee shall by resolution determine who may enter into contracts or execute and deliver instruments in the name of and on behalf of the Corporation. The Executive Committee may grant such authority generally, or it may confine its grant of such authority to specific instances.

Section 5:2. Checks, Drafts, Etc. The Executive Committee shall by resolution determine who shall be required to sign and who, if anyone, shall be required to co-sign all checks, drafts, or orders for or in the name of the Corporation.

Section 5:3. Deposits. All funds of the Corporation shall be deposited from time to time to the credit of the Corporation in such depository or depositories as the Board of Directors may select.

Section 5:4. Gifts. The Executive Committee may accept on behalf of the Corporation any contribution, gift, bequest, or devise for any special or general purpose of the Corporation.

ARTICLE VI

MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS

Section 6:1. Fiscal Year. The fiscal year of the Corporation shall begin on the first day of October and end on the last day of September of each year.

Section 6:2. Interested Directors and Officers.

A. If paragraph B below is satisfied, no contract or other transaction between the Corporation and any of its directors or officers (or any corporation or firm in which any of them is directly or indirectly interested) shall be invalid solely because of this relationship or because of the presence of such director or officer at the meeting authorizing such contract or transaction, or such person's participation in such meeting or authorization.

B. Paragraph A above shall apply only if:

1. The contract or transaction is fair to the Corporation as of the time it is authorized or ratified by the Board of Directors or a committee of the Board; or

2. The material facts of the relationship or interest of each such director or officer are known or disclosed: (a) to the Executive Committee and it nevertheless authorizes or ratifies the contract or transaction by a majority of the directors present, each such interested person to be counted for quorum and voting purposes; or (b) to the Board of Directors and it nevertheless authorizes or ratifies the contract or transaction by a majority of the directors present, each such interested director to be counted in determining whether a quorum is present but not in calculating the majority necessary to carry the vote.

C. The provisions contained in paragraphs A and B above shall not be construed to invalidate a contract or transaction which would be valid in the absence of such provisions.

Section 6:3. Indemnification of Directors and Officers. The Corporation shall indemnify, to the extent hereafter provided, any director, member of a committee, officer, agent, or employee of the Corporation; any former Director, member of a committee, officer, agent, or employee of the Corporation; and any person who may have served at the Corporation's request as a Director, member of a committee, officer, agent, or employee of another Corporation in which the Corporation owns or has owned stock or of which it is or has been a creditor. The indemnification shall be against expenses actually and necessarily incurred by such person, and any amount paid in satisfaction of judgments in connection with any action, suit, or proceeding (whether civil or criminal) in which he or she is made a party by reason of being or having been such a Director, member of a committee, officer, agent, or employee (whether or not such at the time the costs or expenses are incurred by or imposed on him) except in relation to matters as to which he or she shall be adjudged in such action, suit, or proceeding to be liable for gross negligence or willful misconduct in the performance of duty. The Corporation may also reimburse to any such person the reasonable costs of settlement of any such action, suit, or proceeding, if it is found by a majority of the committee of the Directors not involved in the matter (whether or not a quorum) that it was to the interest of the Corporation to make such settlement and that such person was not guilty of gross negligence or willful misconduct. These rights of indemnification and reimbursement shall not be exclusive of any other rights to which such person may be entitled by law, agreement, shareholders' vote, or otherwise.

Section 6:4. Waiver of Notice. Whenever any notice is required to be given under the provisions of the

Non-Profit Corporation Act of Texas or under the provisions of these Bylaws, a waiver thereof in writing signed by the person or persons entitled to such notice, whether before or after the time stated therein, shall be deemed to be equivalent to such notice.

Section 6:5. Books and Records. The Corporation shall keep correct and complete books and records of account and shall also keep minutes of the proceedings of its Board of Directors, Executive Committee, and any other committees having any of the authority of the Board of Directors, and shall keep at the registered office a record giving the names and addresses of its Directors.

Section 6:6. Authority to Borrow Funds. The Board of Directors of the Corporation is hereby authorized to borrow funds, if necessary, to carry out the operations of the Corporation, pledging as security for such borrowing the assets of the Corporation.

Section 6:7. Amendment to Bylaws. These Bylaws may be enlarged, amended or repealed by a majority vote of the Board of Directors, present at an annual, quarterly, or special meeting of the Board of Directors, provided written notice of the proposed amendment has been mailed to all members of the Board of Directors at least ten (10) days prior to the meeting at which it is to be voted upon.

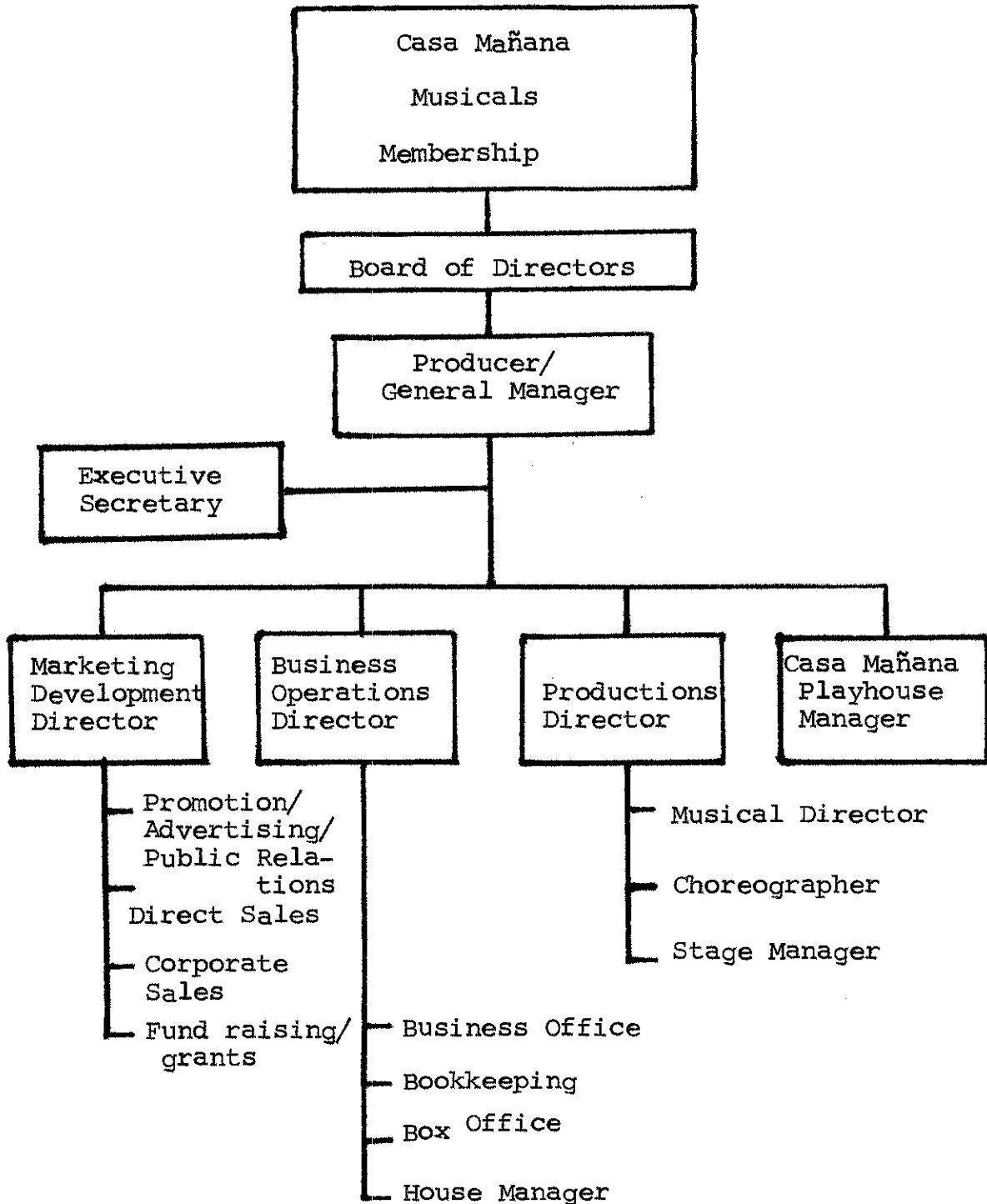
APPENDIX C

CASA MAÑANA ORGANIZATION

CHART

CASA MAÑANA ORGANIZATION

Structure recommended by Moore Diversified Services
Currently (1980) Being Implemented



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