

# You Cain't Say No to OKLAHOMA! by Jamiahsh

Yes, my first byline appeared in today's local newspaper. VERY exciting and fun how it came about. Last Thursday, I received an email asking if I would like to go and review the local production of *OKLAHOMA!*. The extremely talented regular reviewer of theatrical productions was unavailable for press night. The fact that he is also the president of the board for the non-profit theatre group also might have played a role. So, I quickly replied and was really excited about the opportunity.

Just prior to the beginning of my voice lesson, I hear my cell phone ring (and no it is no longer what I was informed was the theme to "Sex and the City..." never seen either the tv show... or the movie). I quickly got the details... time was the most important thing, the rest I pretty much figured out on my own.

A small town community theatre needs positive feedback from the media. These are not paid professionals performing here. As I have said before, the show is not one of my favorites for many reasons... chief among them is the length. However, I am pleased to say that [Fountain City Festival's](#) performance was top notch. It was very easy to mention all of the principal actors and a few of the veterans who have been involved in the eleven shows the group has produced (two of which I have been in).

The production team decided to remain totally faithful to Rodgers and Hammerstein's original. So faithful that only 8 measures of the score were dropped. Everything gelled nicely; the acting, singing, orchestra, set, costuming, and choreography were all superb. Where most groups may drop such moments as the Dream Ballet for the benefit of time or the lack of decent dancers, the sequence was included and it was

extraordinary. In fact, all of the big dance numbers were high energy and very engaging. All of the performers on stage (from Curly all the way to the cameo performers) remarkably brought their roles to life. The director also was involved on stage... very fun. He surely had a lot of help from his production team. I have also worked with the vocal director and pit conductor in the past.

While there was a lot of good to put in the review, it was hard to put into a coherent article. Who wants to read a review containing the same adjectives over and over. I had to put in a bit of the history... which was easy for the show which kicked off the modern musical... as well as enough of the plot to engage anyone who might not know the show. Plus be kind to everyone involved. Finally... shortly after 1AM Friday morning (about the same amount of time it took for the entire show), I forwarded a copy. It only took a three editions of the paper to see the light of day. It could have stood a bit of editing to reflect the show dates. I just hope no one tries to attend a performance tonight.

So... anyone in the area who wants to see a great performance of the most classic of modern musicals... check out the remaining shows this weekend. Just forget how dated the material is. I do think there is an audience for these light-hearted shows. And as the banner on the website says: Professional Quality Theatre in Northwest Ohio. And another piece to add to my resume! Right up there with a little television performance.

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# Summer Planning

There are three shows being presented by area theatres that pique my interest. First on the list is the Village Players little three person cast play, *Miracles*. I was loaned a copy of the script and I read it twice. It is very emotional and thought-provoking with a few moments of lightheartedness. Definitely would be the most challenging show ever. It does have a little singing in it for the one male character and the teenage girl.

ACT is performing *Seussical* in July. I discussed this with my mentor and we both agreed that while it would definitely be fun, it would also be a cakewalk. It has been years since I last was in an ACT's production of *Fiddler on the Roof* and would like to one day return to their neck of the woods.

I have nothing really against *Oklahoma!* (the final show on the horizon) but it has been done so many times in HIGH SCHOOLS. I'm sorry but I really want to challenge myself with something outside my safety zone. But I will audition for it if neither of the other two shows pan out. Plus, being the last show to audition for, I wouldn't have any other choice... trying out for no show is not an option!

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## The First Important Modern American Musical

That seems like an oxymoron since the United States originated the concept of the musical. It seems like we were in competition with our cousins across the big pond in the 1970s & '80s with the Second British Invasion and the shows of

Andrew Lloyd Webber and others like *Les Miserables*.

Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II began their collaboration in 1943 with the musical *Oklahoma!* While it may seem dull and passe by today's demand for bigger, flashier, even bordering on the cinematic, this show set the standard for which all musicals are judged. This summer, [Fountain City Festival](#) will be presenting this benchmark classic. *Oklahoma!* was innovative for several reasons. Most importantly, it established the "book musical." For the first time, the plot, music, lyrics, and choreography became integrated. No longer would there be a story divided by songs and dances that did nothing to advance the plot.

It did not begin with a big chorus number as had been the practice in operettas. Curly enters singing one of the many songs of the American Song Book: "Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin.'"

Something else that was totally unheard of... the title song was not even heard until the end of show.

The invention of the "Dream Ballet" was first used to foreshadow coming events and delve inside the psyche of a main character.

While the simple plot of every day life in turn of the century Oklahoma Territory seems corny 70+ years later, *Oklahoma!* will forever hold a spot in the formation of the modern musical. Better shows may have come along since and seem to overshadow it, but without it the concept of the musical would be far different.