FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

**A Fine Romance**
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This book takes its title from a song in the 1936 film musical, *Swing Time*, which starred Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. The lyric recalls a sophisticated tension that strikes the perfect mood and sets the tempo for this all-out production of a book describing the development of the American musical in the twentieth century, by mirroring the transcontinental *pas de deux* between another pair—larger, more flamboyant: Hollywood and Broadway.

This reluctant pair needs each other, especially for ideas and visionary talent, and necessary production genius; yet each disdained the perceived shortcomings of the other's milieu—studio lot or theatre stage. Like the icy characters played by Fred and Ginger, who can't stay apart, Hollywood and Broadway are inexorably drawn to each other. Enter the author, who recognizes the rich material here for an entertaining history.

Denkert was originally a theatre lawyer involved in Broadway and off-Broadway productions. She later joined the legal department of United Artists and then MGM, and is now senior executive vice-president in charge of legal and business affairs for all of MGM's entertainment divisions. "As a privileged insider," she writes, "I have had the unique opportunity to experience these two entertainment mediums, not only from the outside in, but also, joyously, from the inside out."

To set forth her case, Denkert opens her program in the book's introduction with a brisk summary of the status of the rapidly evolving musical form—both film and stage—in America. She writes that when *Showboat*, a musical adaptation of Edna Ferber's novel, opened on Broadway in 1927, it was a smash hit. The same year, in Hollywood, Warner Bros.' adaptation of Samson Raphaelson's 1925 Broadway play *The Jazz Singer* starring Al Jolson "sent audiences reeling." This phenomenon, she notes, "blew the theatre's complacency, its sense of superiority, out of the water."

Denkert's romance testimony begins with the saga of two cinema masterpieces that opened in 1950: Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard* and Joseph Mankiewicz's *All About Eve*. Both films "explored the dark side of stardom," (one of Hollywood and the other of Broadway) and

received an avalanche of Academy Award nominations: eleven for *Sunset*, and fourteen for *Eve*. It was "only a matter of time before these classic movies would be considered as potential Broadway musicals, their high drama irresistible to musical theatre producers, composers and book writers." Time in this case was lengthy.

*Sunset Boulevard*, having an operatic feel to its drama, seemed the most likely to be able to be adapted to a musical format, but no composers chose to tackle the task. It was not until 1992 that a musical version by Andrew Lloyd Webber opened in England to mixed reviews. In 1994, Webber's production opened again in Los Angeles, (appropriately) at the Schubert Theatre, featuring the film star Glenn Close as Norma Desmond.

*All About Eve*'s metamorphosis was accomplished in less time, but delayed because of the difficulty obtaining rights to the film story. After much maneuvering and a change of title to *Applause*, the musical version opened on Broadway in 1970, a "mere" twenty years later.

In ensuing chapters, the author follows the odysseys of a dozen more selected musical productions, adding plenty of anecdotes to increase readers' appreciation for the final successes. For example, Alan J. Lerner wails, "How does one write a non-love song?" as he is writing lyrics for *My Fair Lady*, the adaptation of Shaw's play, *Pygmalion*, which, Lerner notes, is a *non* -love story. Other librettists faced similar challenges, which are scarcely ever apparent in the finished product.

Denkert arrives at the twenty-first century and concludes her testimony with a chapter on two "cult" musicals, *The Producers* and *Hairspray*. Each production has an unlikely story line, and began life as a small independent film designed to shock or disgust a special audience. Somehow these films attracted the interest of producers and were forged into full-blown Broadway shows. "A new genre of musicals was born," Denkert writes. "And now that they are huge mass-appeal Broadway successes, guess where they are headed? Back to Hollywood!"

Denkert's waltz through the bi-coastal history of the American musical keeps up a dizzying pace, and is dense with names and places, which make reading the text a challenge. Browsing is a rewarding alternative, particularly because of the lavish photographs, which add a grand sense of drama, and highlight the bigger-than-life aspect of the show business world. Either way, this fine romance is irresistible.

*Joyce Moore*