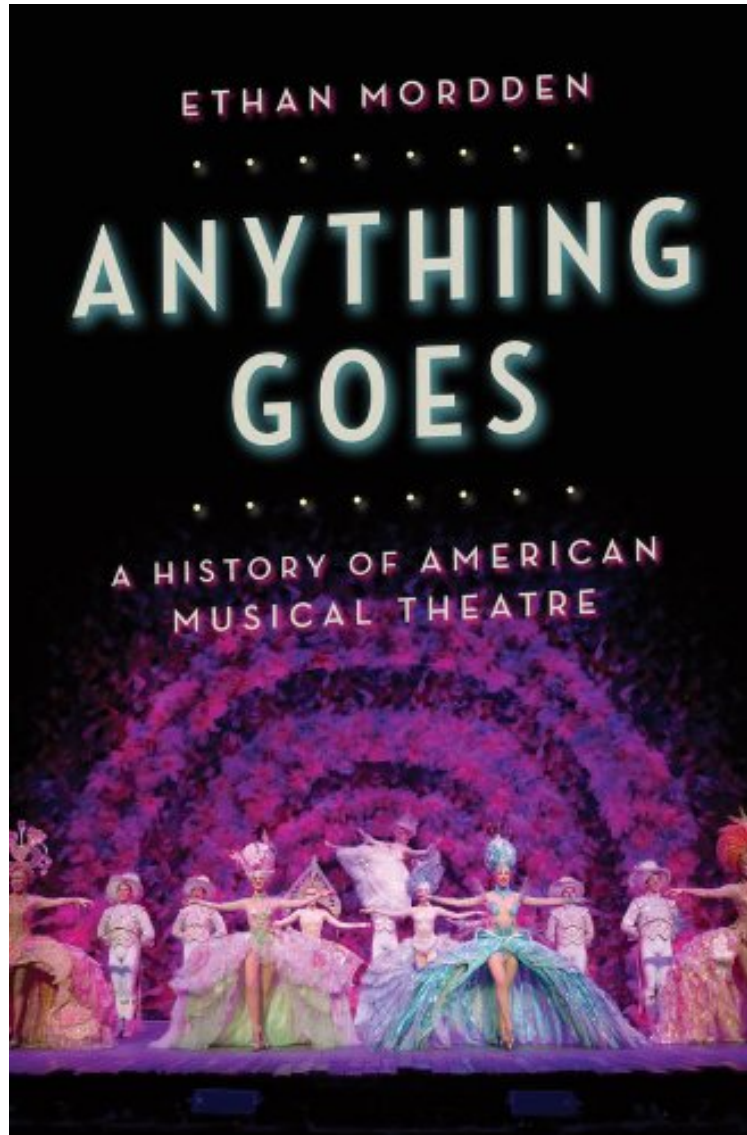


Anything Goes: A History of American Musical Theatre

Ethan Mordden

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Ethan Mordden : Anything Goes: A History of American Musical Theatre before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Anything Goes: A History of American Musical Theatre:

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful. If you think you know everything about musicals, Ethan Mordden knows more. By Bruce from Forest Hills. Reading Ethan Mordden's books on Broadway musicals is like spending an evening sharing a conversation and a bottle of good wine with a brilliant, witty mind. The digressions are often more enlightening than the main story. Mordden will tell you things you never heard before and show you ways of thinking you never thought of before. The focus on Victor Herbert makes me look forward to exploring more of his music. The

focus on the great early comedians makes you wish you had been there to see them. Mordden shows how their disappearance may have been necessary for the development of the musical as an art form. Yet, you can feel a palpable loss. Most interesting for me was Mordden's focus on *Allegro* as a major piece in the development of the modern-day musical. I think I have read all of the "decade" books that Mordden has written. However, those books do not have the luxury of making the vast leaps between eras that this book makes. My only criticism is not about the book itself as much as it is about the marketing. It is one of the most comprehensive histories of the musical I ever read. It goes far from Broadway to discuss the importance of *The Beggars Opera* and *The Tales of Hoffman*. However for a book to be both this comprehensive and this short, I think the reader has to know quite a bit about Broadway musicals. But if you think you know your musicals, and you don't mind being enlightened by someone who knows more than you do, you should be reading this book. Unless, of course, you have tickets to a good musical. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Another brilliant item in the Mordden oeuvre By Gary Maloney This is a one-volume summary of the entire history of musical comedy, of which Mordden has written the definitive multi-volume set (single-decade volumes for the 20s to the 70s, then one for the 80s-2004). The function here is to (a) allow Mordden to update his views on the subject through 2014, (b) do a one-volume, 30,000-ft-perspective version of his gigantic history, (c) integrate his "Ages of Musical Theatre" trope in a more coherent form, (d) elaborate on pre-1920s musical history in a way he hasn't done since the "Broadway Babies" book some three decades ago. It's prime stuff, and his prose remains biting and unponderous, dropping in the occasional research nugget for the obsessives (much as Cole Porter's lyrics often included jokes designed exclusively for first-nighters). Welcome also is a recap of the 20s, as his decade volume "Make Believe" is out-of-print and often commands outrageous prices on half.com and . (Mine is a Xerox from a library copy.) Let's hope he keeps this going for years to come. The book he hasn't quite written, that I'd love to see, would bridge his fascinations with theatre and film -- a definitive history of film adaptations of theatrical originals. Include plays AND musicals, and also TV adaptations (e.g. Hallmark Hall of Fame). Ethan's done the "Hollywood Musicals" book, which touched a little on this. But the way most people today experience Broadway originals is NOT the stage, but through the medium of film or broadcast -- there's a wealth yet to be covered, and it deserves the Mordden treatment . . . issues such as fidelity to the original, compromises, censorship, improvements . . . and what about all those brilliant TV adaptations, like Judith Anderson's "Medea" or Meredith Mostel in "Waiting for Godot," Scott Dewhurst in "The Price" . . . Many of us grew up loving the theatre because we saw it first on television or the movies; this deserves a focused review all its own. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Fasconatin' Writin' By Calicokid This is another one of the many books I've read by the author. Because his books tend to cover much of the same subject, there is, of course, some overlap in information. He has strong opinions but nevertheless, the writing is always filled with humor and fascinating tidbits. For anyone who wants to really 'get into the weeds' of the subject.

Ethan Mordden has been hailed as "a sharp-eared listener and a discerning critic," by Opera News, which compares his books to "dinner with a knowledgeable, garrulous companion." The "preeminent historian of the American musical" (New York Times), he "brings boundless energy and enthusiasm buttressed by an arsenal of smart anecdotes" (Wall Street Journal). Now Mordden offers an entirely fresh and infectiously delightful history of American musical theatre. *Anything Goes* stages a grand revue of the musical from the 1700s through to the present day, narrated in Mordden's famously witty, scholarly, and conversational style. He places us in a bare rehearsal room as the cast of *Oklahoma!* changes history by psychoanalyzing the plot in the greatest of the musical's many Dream Ballets. And he gives us tickets for orchestra seats on opening night-raising the curtain on the pleasures of Victor Herbert's *The Red Mill* and the thrill of *Porgy and Bess*. Mordden examines the music, of course, but also more neglected elements. Dance was once considered as crucial as song; he follows it from the nineteenth century's zany hoofing to tap "combinations" of the 1920s, from the injection of ballet and modern dance in the 1930s and '40s to the innovations of Bob Fosse. He also explores the changing structure of musical comedy and operetta, and the evolution of the role of the star. Fred Stone, the avuncular Scarecrow in the *Wizard of Oz*, seldom varied his acting from part to part; but the versatile Ethel Merman turned the headlining role inside out in *Gypsy*, playing a character who was selfish, fierce, and destructive. From "ballad opera" to burlesque, from *Fiddler on the Roof* to *Rent*, the history and lore of the musical unfolds here in a performance worthy of a standing ovation.

From Booklist *Starred* One of the two most American contributions to world art, the musical springs (as does the other, jazz) from immigrant stock. Its grand progenitor, Mordden says, is John Gay's *The Beggars Opera* (1728), a socially satirical parody of the Italian operas that then dominated London theater. Gay's wildly popular "ballad opera," consisting of popular tunes given new words, inspired imitations that gradually shifted from existing to newly composed music, eventuating in Gilbert and Sullivan's concoctions in England and Offenbach's confections in Paris. Late nineteenth-century America enthusiastically imported those shows and started mixing their ingredients with those of native musical entertainment, especially the minstrel show and burlesque (and while the former was performed in blackface, the latter didn't consist of strippers and blue humor).

That's the musical's beginnings, and its subsequent life is an evolutionary history of varying forms right down to the present. Mordden brightly differentiates those forms, citing hundreds and analyzing dozens of examples of them in a sweeping narrative that, with plenty of sass and tang, wit and even a little snark, not to mention scholarly precision, is obviously the best-ever history of the musical and likely to remain so for a very long time. Individual shows and even numbers leap to life in Mordden's colorful prose, both in the main text and the hefty bibliographical and discographical essays that propel the volume to a hilarious final bon mot. --Ray Olson "[T]he book takes us to present day, Mr. Mordden has a lot of ground to cover, but his high-energy style carries us along amiably, and it soon becomes obvious that he hasn't set out to write a reference work but... a survey of an art form seen through the eyes of a breathless and opinionated host." --The Wall Street Journal "More journalistic than academic, *Anything Goes* has a relaxed spryness. ("Oklahoma!" in Mordden memorable formulation, "is a musical comedy undergoing psychoanalysis.") It's the work of an expert who is also an unabashed fan, an inveterate theatergoer who can deconstruct a score and reel off sparking backstage anecdotes all in the same paragraph." --Los Angeles Times "Mordden remains an undisputed heavyweight in his field; his output is impressively comprehensive and his enthusiasm inexhaustible." --Washington Independent of Books "[O]bviously the best-ever history of the musical and likely to remain so for a very long time. Individual shows and even numbers leap to life in Mordden's colorful prose, both in the main text and the hefty bibliographical and discographical essays that propel the volume to a hilarious final bon mot." --Booklist (starred review) "For four decades he has been entertaining and enlightening readers with mind-boggling regularity and with perspective, perspicacity, and pizzazz. Now with *Anything Goes* Mordden miraculously manages to stylishly convey in an indispensable single volume, the uncanny and encyclopedic breadth of his knowledge-and the complexity of this enchanted American art form." --Geoffrey Block, author of *Enchanted Evenings: The Broadway Musical from "Show Boat" to Sondheim and Lloyd Webber*, and Series Editor of Oxford's *Broadway Legacies* "Simply the best one-volume cronicle of the art-form." --Stage Direction Magazine "Anything Goes offers the surest description of the musical, and represents Mordden's own revised conclusions after almost forty years of considering these issues." --The Gay and Lesbian About the Author Ethan Mordden is a recognized authority on the American musical, and the author of such books as *Make Believe: The Broadway Musical in the 1920s*, *Beautiful Mornin: The Broadway Musical in the 1940s*, and *Coming Up Roses: The Broadway Musical in the 1950s*. He lives in Manhattan.