

# The History of the Twentieth Century

## Episode 244

### “Anything Goes”

#### Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

Music has always been a part of theatre, but in the early twentieth century, the cultural traditions of opera and the everyday entertainments of music hall and vaudeville stage came together into a new kind of musical theatre, one that blended catchy tunes with serious themes.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening Theme]

Episode 244. Anything Goes.

Theatre as an art form probably predates civilization. It is likely that human beings have been acting out stories in front of audiences for tens of thousands of years, and you can find this form of expression in cultures around the world. In our Western culture, we generally think of theatre as beginning in ancient Greece, and entire ancient Greek plays have survived into the modern world. The word *theatre* itself is Greek in origin.

It also seems likely that for as long as there has been theatre, theatrical performances have included not only the staging and acting of plays, but also of related arts, particularly music, dance, and pantomime, either as part of the play, or before, or after, or during interludes within.

During the Middle Ages, Europe saw what we might call “highbrow” theatre, sponsored by one or the other of the Lords Spiritual, the Church, or the Lords Temporal, the state. These performances were serious, high minded, and intended to educate and uplift.

There were also traveling performers who eked out a marginal existence entertaining ordinary people in exchange for more modest compensation. These performances were all about fun. They relied heavily on comedy and often strayed into the dangerous territories of mockery and bawdiness, speaking the unspeakable, though perhaps through a story or an allegory. We might call this “lowbrow” theatre.

As an aside: I'm going to be using the words "highbrow" and "lowbrow" to describe arts and entertainments in this episode because they're convenient terms and easy to understand. To my mind, the distinguishing characteristics of "highbrow" are that it is more restrained and often requires the audience to have some familiarity with the form in order to fully appreciate it, while the distinguishing characteristics of "lowbrow" are that anything goes and anyone can understand what's going on. I don't mean them as value judgments. Whatever people may say, we all enjoy lowbrow entertainments, and we are all capable of appreciating highbrow entertainments, provided we're willing to invest some effort in learning how they work. Not everyone wants to bother with that though, and that's fine. Different strokes for different folks, as they say.

England, and later the larger English-speaking world, developed a rich heritage of both kinds of theatre. Naturally, I have to name-check William Shakespeare here, who well understood the value, both artistic and financial, in threading the needle between highbrow and lowbrow entertainment.

At the same time Shakespeare was at the peak of his career in London—or, to be more precise, in Southwark—Italian composers were presenting the first examples of a new musical and theatrical form, opera. Operas are essentially plays in which everything is sung, with orchestral accompaniment.

From the early days of the form, operas typically included singing in two distinct styles. The first is recitative, which is not so much a song as sung dialog. There is usually no meter and no rhyme, and the accompaniment is limited. In the early days, it was a harpsichord and a cello. The second is arias, which are more like songs. Usually the words are in meter and the lines rhyme, and arias are accompanied by the full orchestra. Recitative is less interesting musically, but it is where the characters talk to one another and the plot moves forward. Arias are musical showpieces in which the characters express their thoughts and feelings, almost as an aside to the audience, really. And during an aria, the plot stops dead in the water.

In the Europe of the Belle Époque, you could still distinguish this two-tiered system of arts and entertainment. There were plays and operas and concerts of classical music, highbrow performances intended for those with educated, elite tastes, and there were lowbrow entertainments that included comedy, dance, and popular music. In Britain, the distinctive manifestation of this form of entertainment was the music hall. These were like theatres, with entertainments on a stage, but the audience would be seated at tables and could eat and drink and smoke during the performances. The onstage entertainments would be a series of unconnected performances, including songs, dances, comedy skits, mimes, jugglers, anything that might draw an audience, really.

The music halls were where most popular songs of the period got their start. A few music hall songs are still familiar to English-speakers in our time, like "It's a Long Way to Tipperary" and

“Daisy Bell,” two songs we’ve encountered before on the podcast, as well as classics like “I’m Henry the Eighth, I Am,” “The Man on the Flying Trapeze,” and “Pack Up Your Troubles in Your Old Kit-Bag.” I bet most of you listening could sing a line or two from every one of those songs.

Canada and the United States had comparable entertainments, but we don’t call them “music hall” because you didn’t find that sort of venue in North America. On this continent, we speak of burlesque and especially vaudeville.

Both of these forms got their start in France, as their names suggest. The word burlesque originally meant a parody or mockery, often of some other literary or dramatic work. A 19<sup>th</sup>-century burlesque might, for example, put on a staged parody of Hamlet that ridicules the story and includes lots of bad puns and ribald humor. This kind of entertainment is still very much with us today. On television, among other places.

Over time, the sexually suggestive humor and the scantily clad young women overtook the other elements of burlesque and it became a form of entertainment most noted for pushing the bounds of sexual humor and nudity as far as the law of that time and place would allow. Often a little bit farther than that. By the Roaring Twenties, burlesque was synonymous with strip-tease acts, the most famous of these being Sally Rand, Blaze Starr, and Gypsy Rose Lee. Between the strip-tease acts there would usually be interludes of ribald stand-up comedy. Some of the most famous comedians of the era got their start in burlesque, including Eddie Cantor, W.C. Fields, Bud Abbott and Lou Costello, Fanny Brice, Mae West, Sophie Tucker, and Jackie Gleason. New York City was the capital of burlesque during the Jazz Age until the late 1930s, when the administration of reform mayor Fiorello LaGuardia cracked down on lewd entertainment in the city.

Vaudeville was burlesque’s more upscale cousin. It offered a variety of entertainments in the form of short performances, usually unrelated to each other, by singers, musicians, comedians, dancers, magicians, acrobats, jugglers, you name it. The emphasis here is on the word variety; in fact, *variety show* was sometimes used as a synonym. Vaudeville filled the same entertainment niche in North America that music hall did in the British Isles. It was the most important form of entertainment from about 1880 to about 1930, when it was overtaken by motion pictures and radio. I won’t bother to list the biggest vaudeville stars of the early twentieth century. Anyone who sang or danced or did comedy likely got their start in vaudeville: everyone from Judy Garland to Sammy Davis, Jr., to Kate Smith, the Marx Brothers and Jack Benny. And all the burlesque comedians I listed a minute ago had cleaned-up versions of their acts that they performed on the vaudeville stage.

I really don’t want to bring this up, but any survey of stage entertainment in the United States has to include minstrel shows. The word minstrel usually means a medieval European entertainer, often itinerant, who performed a variety of acts not unlike what you’d see in vaudeville, but in

the United States, the term *minstrel show* has another meaning, that of white entertainers who darkened their skin and sang or danced or did comic skits while pretending to be African American. Their portrayals of African Americans ranged from offensive to repulsive. Minstrel shows were often advertised as carefully researched reproductions of authentic African-American music and manners, which raises the question of why white audiences who embraced what they took to be African-American art and culture never embraced, you know, actual African Americans.

Minstrelsy took off before the Civil War, when most African Americans were enslaved. The final decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the bizarre development of minstrel shows performed by African-American entertainers. At the time, it was virtually the only way an African American entertainer could get a gig in front of a white audience.

By the early twentieth century, and particularly after the Great War, as African-American entertainers were more frequently included in mainstream entertainment, professional minstrelsy faded away. But bits with white performers performing in blackface continued to be included in vaudeville for some time. Minstrel show bits were also included in US motion pictures into the 1950s.

The very first feature film with sound, 1927's *The Jazz Singer*, features Al Jolson portraying a singer who performs in blackface, and you find it as recently as the 1983 film *Trading Places*, which has a scene with Dan Ackroyd in blackface, for reasons that escape me.

And what was *Amos 'n' Andy*, if not audio blackface?

By the time of the 1960s civil rights movement, professional minstrelsy was quite dead, but white amateur minstrel performers continued to wear blackface for the rest of the century, and believe it or not, it occasionally appears even in our time.

Minstrelsy died away, but it influenced other forms of American entertainment. Stock characters like Jim Crow, the loud and irritating intruder into an otherwise placid scene and the dandy who puts on airs and pretends to be far more educated and sophisticated than he actually is but constantly gives himself away by misusing or mispronouncing words and displaying unfamiliarity with common etiquette, these characters still regularly appear in modern comedy, although in a deracialized form. Jokes that originated in minstrel shows are still familiar to us, like “Why did the chicken cross the road?” “To get to the other side.” and “Who was that lady I saw you with?” “That was no lady; that was my wife!”

There's one last form of 19<sup>th</sup>-century entertainment I need to mention: the operetta. The word *operetta* is literally the diminutive form and means *little opera*. Operettas first appeared in France in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They are characterized by being shorter and less ambitious in scope than grand opera. They also typically take on lighter topics with less drama, and more humor, even satire. And they dispense altogether with recitative; characters simply

speak their dialog and save their singing voices for the arias—this at a time when grand opera was getting grander and grander; witness the works of Richard Wagner.

The big name in French operetta was the German-born Jaques Offenbach. In Austria, it was Johann Strauss. But the team that introduced operetta to the English-speaking world was that of the phenomenally successful partnership of dramatist Sir William Schwenk Gilbert and composer Sir Arthur Sullivan, who in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century produced fourteen famous comic operettas, including *The Pirates of Penzance*, *The Mikado*, and *HMS Pinafore*.

The operettas of Gilbert and Sullivan were received enthusiastically everywhere in the English-speaking world. They were frequently performed, frequently imitated, and frequently plagiarized.

[music: Sullivan, *Overture di ballo*]

In contrast to French operetta, which was often risqué, Gilbert and Sullivan produced tame, family-friendly shows you wouldn't be ashamed to take your children to. Or your grandmother. Their operettas were often painfully proper and very Victorian, so much so that after listening for a bit you begin to suspect that Victorian values are actually being...mocked?

Examples are legion, but my personal favorite comes from the lesser-known *Utopia, Limited*, in which a British financial expert explains to the natives of a South Seas island the benefits of incorporation, which he defines as a group of men, all Peers if possible, who form an association, beginning with a public declaration of the extent to which they mean to pay their debts. And I quote from his aria, "That's called their Capital: if they are wary/They will not quote it at a sum immense./The figure's immaterial. It may vary/from eighteen million down to eighteen pence.

"I should put it rather low,/The good sense of doing so/Will be evident to any debtor./When it's left to you to say/What amount you mean to pay,/Why, the lower you can put it at, the better."

Now that I recite these lyrics aloud, I can almost believe that somebody is being made fun of. On the surface, this is light, fluffy, inoffensive entertainment, but underneath that cotton candy exterior lies something with a bit more bite.

You might label the kind of entertainment produced by Messrs. Gilbert and Sullivan "middlebrow." It is light; you don't need a background in opera to appreciate it. It is inoffensive; you wouldn't be ashamed to be seen by your boss or your mother at one of their productions. And yet, if you dig a little, you will find ideas that reward the effort.

Now, this is why I persist in labeling entertainments as highbrow, lowbrow, and now middlebrow. In the stratified, aristocratic 19<sup>th</sup> century, expensive highbrow entertainments, like opera and orchestral concerts, were just the thing for the wealthy, powerful, aristocratic elites with lots of time and money on their hands. More lowbrow entertainments, like music hall or

vaudeville, can be supported with ticket sales to people of modest means, because they don't require a lot of investment.

Operetta represents a newer, middle form of entertainment aimed at the sensibilities, and the pocketbooks, of the newly emerging middle class with money to spend. But it was not only about their income and numbers. Modern urban transit systems made it cheaper and easier to get to the theatre. Street lighting made it safer. The result was that stage shows enjoyed longer runs than ever before. In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a show that ran for a hundred performances in London or New York was remarkable. By the end of the century, the works of Gilbert and Sullivan regularly ran for more than 500 performances. These new, longer runs made it feasible to invest more money in the show, since you could amortize the cost over more performances. This meant innovations such as the construction of full, 3D sets, rather than mere painted backdrops, and the introduction of electric lighting in different colors to add visual interest.

Sir Arthur Sullivan passed away in 1900, and British audiences drifted away from operetta and to the new Edwardian musical comedies. In the US, the operetta tradition was carried on by Irish-American composer Victor Herbert, best known for 1903's *Babes in Toyland* and 1910's *Naughty Marietta*. The tradition continued into the 1920s, notably with the aid of two other immigrant composers, Sigmund Romberg, born to a Jewish family in Hungary, and Rudolph Friml, a Czech born in Prague, then part of Austria.

Meanwhile, in London these musical comedies I alluded to were taking over the theatres. They resembled the works of Gilbert and Sullivan in some respects, but replaced the airy, sophisticated arias with songs in the style of contemporary popular music. Generally, the songs and the story were written by different people, and didn't have a lot to do with each other. Songs were often changed or replaced during a show's run in the hope of enticing people to come back and see it again.

This style of musical theatre migrated to the United States, which already had its vaudeville traditions. The US was also importing from France the revue, spelled the French way, R-E-V-U-E. It's supposed to represent a "review" of the most popular entertainments of the moment. The absolute king of this style of show was the impresario Florenz Ziegfeld, who staged an annual extravaganza known as the Ziegfeld Follies every year from 1907 through 1925, and again in 1927 and one final production in 1931. He died in 1932.

Ziegfeld was a master showman and the Ziegfeld Follies featured productions of the most popular songs of the time, featuring the Ziegfeld Girls, a large troupe of women chorus dancers performing with elaborate costumes and sets, along with comedy routines by the most popular comedians of the era. These were really elaborate, upscale vaudeville shows, but Ziegfeld paid his performers top dollar, which he made back by charging his audiences the exorbitant price of \$5 per ticket, at a time when a seat in a silent-film theater might cost you a quarter.

But these revues, from Ziegfeld and his legions of imitators, made no attempt to link the performances together; they were meant as a sort of buffet or sampler of what was already the most popular entertainment of the year. New songs and new entertainers required new shows every year.

By the Roaring Twenties, British-style musical theatre was becoming entrenched in the United States, just in time to save the American songwriting profession. As long-time listeners well know, the songwriting business in the US, known as Tin Pan Alley, used to make its money from the sale of sheet music direct to consumers, who played the songs on the piano at home. The introduction of first, the phonograph, and then, broadcast radio, eliminated a good chunk of Tin Pan Alley's income. But musical stage shows opened up a new market for songwriters. As with everything else in the Roaring Twenties, the center of gravity for musical theatre shifted from London to New York, where they began cranking out light musical shows with catchy popular songs, courtesy of the songwriters of Tin Pan Alley. But these were more than revues; the entertainments were stitched together with something like plot, albeit usually humorous and not meant to be taken all that seriously.

Besides creating a new opportunity for songwriters, this new style of show opened a new opportunity for African-American entertainers. The year 1921 saw the premiere of *Shuffle Along*, the first-ever all-African-American stage show on Broadway. The plot revolved around two business partners who agree to run against each other for mayor in the town that they live in, after secretly agreeing that whichever of them wins will appoint the other one chief of police and afterward the two of them will run the town forever. But they fall to bickering between themselves and are voted out of office. As was typical of these shows, the plot was mostly an excuse to stitch some cool songs together, songs with a notable jazz influence. There's more than a little bit of minstrelsy in this show, but it was a big success, running for over 500 performances and it helped break the color barrier in American entertainment. The show's most memorable song, "I'm Just Wild about Harry" is still familiar to many of us today. One of its chorus line dancers, Josephine Baker, would soon leave New York for Paris and become a huge success on the stage in Europe.

If you're of my age and you think about musical theatre in the 1920s, the first show that comes to your mind is very likely *No, No, Nanette*, which opened in Chicago in 1924, and on Broadway and the West End the following year, and then experienced a successful nostalgic Broadway revival in 1971. The story is a light farce; the show gave us two songs still familiar today: "Tea for Two" and "I Want to Be Happy."

The kings of 1920s musical theatre, though, were George Gershwin, whom we have already met in episode 227, and his brother Ira, who collaborated with him as lyricist on a string of successful Broadway shows. There was 1924's *Lady, Be Good*, about the travails of a brother-sister dance team originally portrayed by the real-life brother-sister dance team of Fred and Adele Astaire. This show gave us the well-known title song and "Fascinating Rhythm." In 1926 came the show

*Oh, Kay!* which gave us the song “Someone to Watch Over Me.” The following year saw *Funny Face*, again starring the Astaires, which gave us the song “S Wonderful.” In 1929 came *Show Girl*, which included a ballet sequence performed to Gershwin’s *An American in Paris*. This one was produced by Florenz Ziegfeld.

A year later *Girl Crazy* came out, the show that launched the careers of Ginger Rogers and Ethel Merman. It includes the songs “Embraceable You” and “I Got Rhythm,” both of which are still familiar today.

The Gershwin brothers were unquestionably the most successful Broadway songwriters of the Roaring Twenties, but the most important, the most influential musical stage show of the period came from a different songwriting team. Before I get to them, however, I have to reintroduce you to the American novelist Edna Ferber. You’ll recall I mentioned last week that she was part of the gang at the Algonquin Roundtable. Born in Kalamazoo, Michigan, Ferber and her family were Jewish and they faced serious anti-Semitism in the American Midwest. Deprived of the opportunity to study acting, which was her first love, Ferber got a job as a reporter for the United Press Association and began to write novels on the side. Her fifth novel, *So Big*, published in 1924, was a tremendous success, winning her that year’s Pulitzer Prize for the Novel.

Soon after, Ferber took an interest in show boats, which were floating theatres that plied the waterways of the United States, particularly the Mississippi River. The performers lived aboard these boats as they traveled from town to town, putting on stage plays and song-and-dance shows at every stop. They were already fading away by 1925, when Edna Ferber discovered them. She was intrigued by the mix of drama, romance, and nostalgia life aboard one of these boats could evoke, and was inspired to write the novel *Show Boat*, published in 1926, a sweeping tale that covers three generations of performers aboard one showboat from the 1880s to the 1920s, a story thick with romance, drama, and involving an interracial couple and their struggles in the South of the time.

The composer Jerome Kern read *Show Boat* and was sufficiently taken by the novel to meet with Ferber to discuss adapting it into a stage musical. Ferber was initially put off by the suggestion, envisioning one of the lighthearted, lightly plotted, song-and-dance shows typical of the period. She thought this wholly inappropriate treatment for a story like *Show Boat*, but Kern won her over by pledging to preserve the serious themes of the novel. Kern, together with lyricist Oscar Hammerstein II, composed a number of songs for the proposed show and performed them for Florenz Ziegfeld, who was then at the peak of his own career. They reasoned that Ziegfeld, noted for his grand spectacles, was the ideal producer for what would have to be an elaborate production. Ziegfeld took to the idea immediately, declaring that “this show is the opportunity of my life.”

You may recall a fellow named Paul Robeson, whom I mentioned back in episode 204, when we were in the year 1919 and Robeson, the only African-American student at Rutgers College, was



valedictorian of that year's graduating class. Robeson went on to Columbia Law School, but abandoned the practice of law soon after graduation because of the racism he encountered. He had also played a little professional football on the side during school, but his big break came in theatre, where he landed the lead roles in first, *The Emperor Jones*, and next, *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, both plays written by Eugene O'Neill. Robeson became famous as a stage actor, though he also performed concerts in which he sang spirituals. Kern and Hammerstein created a role in *Show Boat* with Robeson in mind: an African-American stevedore named Joe. Alas, Robeson was unavailable for the premiere of the show, although he did eventually perform the role of Joe in London and later in New York when *Show Boat* was revived there. The song that Kern and Hammerstein wrote for Robeson would become the biggest hit of the show and inseparable from the name Paul Robeson. "Ol' Man River" is Joe's lament at how, unmoved by the sufferings of the people along its banks, the placid Mississippi River "just keeps rolling along."

*Show Boat*, the musical, premiered in 1927 at Ziegfeld's own newly built 1600-seat theatre on Sixth Avenue above 54<sup>th</sup> Street and was a critical and commercial success. It was the first Broadway show with an integrated cast, the first to tell a story about an interracial relationship, and the first to take a serious look at racism. Even more than that, though, it was something new. Not an opera or an operetta, not a revue, and with a far more substantial story to tell than you found in something like *No, No, Nanette*. It was the first real Broadway musical, a show in which the plot is not just a thin excuse to perform some songs and dances, but an equal partner with the music, which illuminates the themes explored by the story.

*Show Boat* was a landmark in the history of theatre, but for now, it will be a singular one. It will not be until the 1940s before anyone else attempts another musical on this scale. The history books will tell you that the stock market crash of 1929 and the Great Depression that followed soured the public on heavy, serious fare and tastes turned back toward light and happy entertainments. There is truth in that, I am sure, but there are a couple of other factors to consider. It was hard to raise money for a big, spectacular show in Depression-era America, even if your name was Florenz Ziegfeld. And the introduction of talking motion pictures you could attend for a fraction of the price drew audiences away from live productions.

But George Gershwin never got discouraged. He continued to write music for the stage and got more serious about it all the time. He and Ira created a musical *Strike Up the Band* in 1927 that was unsuccessful, but was revised and made a better impression with its 1930 revival. *Strike Up the Band* was a pointed political commentary about an American cheese magnate, who lobbies Washington to impose a heavy tariff on imported cheese, and then, following diplomatic protests, induces the US to go to war against Switzerland. The title song from that show became the fight song for the marching band at the University of California, Los Angeles. The Gershwins' next show, 1931's *Of Thee I Sing*, which I mentioned last week, is another political parody, about an unorthodox Presidential campaign. It became the first musical show to win the Pulitzer Prize for Drama.

In 1934, Gershwin began work on an opera based on the 1925 novel *Porgy*, by DuBose Heyward, about a disabled African-American beggar in Charleston, South Carolina and his love for a woman named Bess. It had already been made into a play by DuBose's wife, Dorothy Heyward, so the opera was titled *Porgy and Bess* to distinguish it. *Porgy and Bess* premiered in 1935 in Boston, and afterward on Broadway. With the exception of a few minor parts, all the players were African American, and all classically trained singers. The show was a commercial failure in its own time, although it produced some well-known songs, including "Summertime," "Bess, You Is My Woman Now" and "It Ain't Necessarily So."

The late twentieth century, however, saw a revival of interest in *Porgy and Bess* and in our time it is regarded as perhaps the greatest American opera of all time.

Alas, George Gershwin would not live to see his greatest work come into its own. After its initial failure, he moved to southern California to work on film scores. By 1937, he was complaining of headaches and experiencing coordination problems that impaired his ability to play the piano. In July of that year, he fell into a coma and it was determined that he was suffering from a brain tumor. Surgery was attempted, but he died soon afterward on July 11, at the age of 38, a tremendous loss to American music. We can only dream about what great compositions died with him.

We'll have to stop there for today. I thank you for listening, and I'd especially like to thank Matthew and Steve for their kind donations, and thank you to Lukas for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons like Matthew, Steve, and Lukas help cover the costs of making this show, which in turn keeps the podcast available free for everyone, so my thanks to them and to all of you who have pitched in and helped out. If you'd like to become a patron or make a donation, just visit the website, [historyofthetwentiethcentury.com](http://historyofthetwentiethcentury.com) and click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons.

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And I hope you'll join me next week, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*, as we turn our attention from New York to Paris, which has its own music hall traditions. And New York City may be the up and comer of the moment, but Paris remains a major center of art and culture. The Crazy Years, next week, here, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. I feel I would be remiss if I didn't mention one more songwriter before I leave you for today, a songwriter whose work was and is notable for its sophisticated lyrics coupled with provocative subject matter. His first Broadway success was the 1928 musical *Paris*,

which featured the song, “Let’s Do It.” Later shows would give us “You Do Something to Me” and “What Is This Thing Called Love?”

Cole Porter so impressed Irving Berlin that the older songwriter took out advertisements at his own expense championing the younger composer’s songs. The year 1934 probably marks the peak of Cole Porter’s career, although he continued to write music and songs successfully for decades to come. That was the year that *Anything Goes* premiered on Broadway, starring Ethel Merman and featuring a number of Porter songs that have become standards, including “I Get a Kick Out of You,” “You’re the Top,” “It’s De-Lovely,” “Let’s Misbehave,” and, of course, the title song.

And if you’ll indulge me for a moment of reminiscence, in the closing days of the twentieth century, America Online was conducting a poll of the greatest song of the century. Similarly, National Public Radio was doing the “NPR 100,” their list of the hundred most important pieces of American music of the twentieth century. These projects got me thinking about what I would nominate as the greatest American song of the twentieth century.

I thought to myself, first you would have to lay out your criteria for what the song of the century would be. An American composer, of course. It would have to be a song that was popular in its own time, but still familiar today. It should be by a composer who produced a lot of great songs; no one-hit-wonders, please. And the ideal song would not be merely good and popular, but also somehow summarize the twentieth century itself.

Well, as soon as I put together that list of criteria, the winner became obvious. In the words of Cole Porter: “In olden days a glimpse of stocking/Was looked on as something shocking/But now, God knows/Anything goes.” The song of the century.

[music: Closing Theme]