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# But He Doesn't Know The Territory



"But He Doesn't Know the Territory"

THE MAKING OF MEREDITH WILSON'S THE ALSC MAN



## Synopsis

Composer Meredith Willson once described *The Music Man* as “an Iowa man’s attempt to pay tribute to his home state.” Never once forgetting his roots, Willson reflects on the ups and downs, surprises and disappointments, and finally successes of the making of one of America’s most popular musicals. His whimsical, personable writing style will bring readers back in time with him to the 1950s to experience firsthand the exciting trials and tribulations of creating a Broadway masterpiece. A newfound admiration for *The Music Man* “and the man behind the music” is sure to follow.

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## Customer Reviews

*BUT HE DOESN'T KNOW THE TERRITORY* is *MUSIC MAN* Meredith Wilson's heartbreakingly evocative photograph of what it was like to write a musical for Broadway & bring in the show when the show was *MUSIC MAN* and Broadway meant something. Wilson discusses in lip-smacking detail the creation of his sepia masterwork & the people around it who, like good doctors, assisted in the birth. Snapshots of the great producer Kermit Bloomgarden, the stars Robert Preston & Barabara Cook, the choreographer Oona White and guest appearances by Moss Hart and many

more make this a must have for anybody who wants to know how theatre worked, when it worked in New York in the 1950s. Even if Willson never again created anything of eternal memory (although we are still happy to have MOLLY BROWN) and if a later show (1491) was panned even by his music publisher & supporter Frank Loesser this is a book every theatre-lover & historian has to have. It's that simple!

I learned of the reprint of this book as I was rehearsing a community theatre production of "Meredith Willson's The Music Man." I purchased this and his earlier one (also just republished) "And There I Stood With My Piccolo". If you know the show, or are interested in Americana, you will enjoy this book. It's a breezy read, full of the trials and tribulations of trying to follow a dream when you don't exactly know how to do it. The show took many years to form; Willson, a band leader, radio music director and arranger, had never written a musical before, and the ups and downs of the process in the 1950s, even when you "know people", is conveyed in a hilarious and entertaining way. There are some wonderful down-to-earth narratives in it. I am in the Barbershop Quartet in the show, and was fascinated by his explanation of why he hired a real BSQ for the cast before anyone else, and why he wanted BSQ music in his play. If you are intrigued by the creative process, by the energetic telling of a true story, or by musical theater, you will truly be glad you picked up this book. It was passed on to our Harold Hill, Mrs. Shinn and others, and the last I saw it was on my table in the dressing room where it disappeared! I hope it is still being enjoyed...

One of the few books I've ever read in one sitting. Any fan of THE MUSIC MAN, either the play or the movie, has GOT to read this. Full of amazing anecdotes on the journey this wonderful play (and this novice musical show writer) took to arrive on Broadway. Meredith Willson's infectious matter-of-fact writing style puts you right in the room when Robert Preston auditions for the lead role. You'll get goosebumps when you find out how the role of Winthrop evolved. And you'll get true sense of the painstaking amount of work and time and trouble (with a capital "T") it used to take to put a grand old musical from Broadway's golden age on the boards. The Putnam and Sons version has been out of print for decades, but now because the University of Minnesota Press picked it up EVERYONE can own a copy.

I have them all and I've read them all and (note the cost of the hardback in the pricing) this is the one I paid extra bucks for years ago on a search service-pre internet. The lessons about musical theatre construction are taught here in a way that makes them personal, fun and important to the

reader; not unlike Moss Hart's education in playwrighting in "Act One". Explorations of when to reveal details about a character, how to construct a lyric and most especially the particular art of compression that drives a musical are a delight that simply never leaves the mind. And you will never hear the word 'spaz' the same way again. This is the book I have recommended about musical theatre more than any other and the one I have never (it is the rarest of the pack) lent out. "The Making of 'No No Nanette' is the dishiest-but this book, like the musical it describes is an act of joy and love.

One critical reviewer found this book too wholesome. It is indeed wholesome, G-rated if it were a movie. But isn't that exactly what one would expect from the writer/composer of The Music Man, which is probably the most wholesome musical ever produced? I found it filled with wonderful stories, nearly all of them heart-warming, one of the rare books that make you feel better while reading them, and afterwards, than you did when you started. Willson's style is a kind of mix of Garrison Keillor and Damon Runyon. I couldn't put it down, read it all in a single day and enjoyed every moment of it. Highly recommended.

Like "The Music Man?" Like good writing? Drop what you're doing and order this. I'm so glad it's back in print. Willson is compulsively readable: it's glorious fun. Do note: If you DON'T have the OBC of the show, you'll want to order it as well, because I guaran-damn-tee, you'll want to give it a listen during and after. Trust me.

I can't rate this highly enough. Meredith Willson takes the reader inside his head and into his life during the years he spent writing and developing "The Music Man", one of the greatest American musicals. While his trademark wit and wry laconic humor effortlessly lead the reader through the story, his deep passion and rare intelligence shine through. The book takes you through every twist and turn right up to the curtain on opening night. You learn the slow tortuous process of gradually getting every detail perfect in what we now know as an apparently effortlessly perfect show. Readers who love theatre, musicals, and the history of show business shouldn't miss this wonderful book. It was written and published very shortly after the show's initial success, and every word feels fresh and alive with the feelings of events that have just happened. What a treasure!

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