

The Shaw Festival Presents – Holiday Inn, based on the film from Universal Pictures

Music and lyrics by Irving Berlin

Book by Gordon Greenberg and Chad Hodge

Directed by Kate Hennig

Designed by Judith Bowden

Music direction by Paul Sportelli

Lighting designed by Kevin Lamotte

Choreography by Allison Plamondon

Sound designed by John Lott

## **THE STORY**

It's 1946 New York. Jim Hardy decides to trade in a life of show business and move to the countryside by buying a farm in Connecticut.

He meets Linda, a school teacher whose family built and grew up on the farm. Jim is a total failure at farming, and realizes the farmhouse is in bad shape. With Linda's help, they decide to turn the farmhouse into "Holiday Inn" – an inn open only for the holidays, from Christmas to Thanksgiving, featuring musical performances. They hope the performances will provide the money need to fix the farm.

It's a success! Unfortunately, Ted, Jim's best friend and old vaudeville partner, arrives at the Inn. After dancing with her one night, Ted decides to make Linda his new dancing partner in Hollywood movies.

Will Jim be able to convince Linda to stay with him at "Holiday Inn"?

## **THE MUSICAL: WHO IS IRVING BERLIN?**

Considered one of the greatest songwriters in American history, Irving Berlin was a music composer and lyricist of countless songs that have been compiled into stage and film musicals, including *Holiday Inn*

Born in 1888 in Russia, Irving Berlin and his family were one of thousands of immigrants that arrived on Ellis Island, New York at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

Berlin and his siblings worked from an early age to support their family. One of Berlin's first jobs was as a newspaper boy in the Bowery district of New York City. The diverse melodies coming out of saloons and restaurants were some of the first exposure Berlin had to music.

He would often sing along to the music, which helped him earn extra money while selling newspapers.

When he was 14 years old, Berlin decided to leave home and live with other homeless boys in lodging houses on the Lower East Side of New York City.

Other than his ability to sing, Berlin realized he didn't have any employment skills. So, he joined other boys who went to saloons in the Bowery and sang to customers. He taught himself how to play the piano by improvising music and changing the melodies of other artists' songs.

After being discovered by music publishers and writers, Berlin got his big break as a staff lyricist with the Ted Snyder Company. This led to his first hit song "Alexander's Ragtime Band" in 1911. Berlin would continue to rise and become famous as a songwriter on Broadway as well as with a group of musical artists known as the Tin Pan Alley.

Throughout his 60 year career, it is estimated that he wrote over 1,500 songs, as well as scores for 20 original Broadway productions and 15 original Hollywood films

### **"I'M DREAMING OF...*Holiday Inn!*"**

The idea of *Holiday Inn* was first conceived in 1933 by Irving Berlin himself. While writing the song "Easter Parade", he had the idea of creating a movie musical that pays homage to major American holidays.

In May 1940, Berlin signed a contract with Paramount Pictures to write songs for a film musical. It was based on *his* idea of an inn opened only on holidays. The film was released in 1942 starring Bing Crosby and Fred Astaire and is considered one of the films included in the "Golden Age of Musicals".

The song "White Christmas", the most notable song from the film, was first hummed by Berlin during the production of *Top Hat* in 1935. It was intended to be used for that film's dance duo, but the director declined to use it.

However, it was used in *Holiday Inn*. The song initially performed poorly with audiences watching the film. Ironically, the film was nominated for 3 Academy Awards, winning 1 for Best Original Song for "White Christmas".

"White Christmas" has since become one of the best-selling songs of all time. Its success led to the 1954 film of the same name, again starring Bing Crosby.

## **THE STAGE ADAPTATION OF *HOLIDAY INN***

The original Broadway production of *Holiday Inn* opened in 2016 at Studio 54. This production has kept much of the musical score from the original film, with several songs removed and other songs from Irving Berlin's catalogue included. How many songs you can recognize?

The original film version of *Holiday Inn* contained a musical number performed in blackface. Blackface emerged in vaudeville and minstrel shows where cork and/or theatrical makeup and gross exaggeration and stereotypical caricature behaviours were depicted by white performers to impersonate black individuals.

That number in the film is offensive, dehumanizing, and extremely hurtful. For these reasons, the playwrights omitted the musical number from the 2016 stage adaptation. This is the version the Shaw Festival is producing, reflecting both the respect and spirit of our company and the *Holiday Inn* storyline which focuses on family, love, and acceptance.

## **THE SHAW FESTIVAL'S PRODUCTION**

At the beginning of the show, the designer wanted the set to emulate a small, urban environment, simulating the busyness of New York City and the claustrophobia of dressing rooms and performing on the road. The set then expands into the vast countryside of "Holiday Inn".

The stage proscenium is structured with a frame, allowing a space for the story to be told, while also providing moments where the show explodes into dance.

Visually, the set was inspired by vintage post cards from the 1940s and the embossed, cut-out feel of its design. This design is used in all of the performances at the Inn, which helps to highlight the "show within the show" feel.

Other visual inspiration includes: Norman Rockwell paintings (especially the children's costumes!), the Pump Room in Chicago during the early 1940s, and Cecil B. DeMille's white colour palette. See what you can point out in our production!

The set and costumes are meant to reflect the nostalgia of the 1940s in a simplistic fashion, while still remaining truthful to the time period.

The costumes aim to echo the spirit of the 1940s with clothing that emulates the characters' energy. The costumes for the holiday numbers at the Inn pay tribute to nostalgic memories of those holidays. Watch for these iconic images in the clothing!

There is a wedding in this production! The designer created the wedding dress to reflect a 1950s silhouette. This is to reflect the idea that the characters are moving forward in life to a new era.

### **WHILE YOU'RE WATCHING:**

Think about the ways in which family is depicted in this show. Who would be considered a 'family'? Does this idea still hold true in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?

Do you believe Jim has to choose either performance OR a life in the country, or can he have both?

This production is based off of a 1940s film in the Golden Age of Musicals, but was first brought to the stage in 2016. How different is this production from other musicals about this era? How is it different or similar to other modern musicals?

**We look forward to seeing you at the Shaw Festival!**