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Although we value all our clients, the twelve thousand high schools who perform our shows are of particular importance, for it is at these schools that music and drama educators work to keep theatre alive in their community. MTI shares with these educators the goal of raising the next generation of theatre artists and audiences. To help these educators, it has taken a leading role in theatre education by creating MTI THEATRICAL RESOURCES, a "theatrical tool box" designed to help not only ensure the success of each musical production, but also to establish the study of musical theatre as a permanent part of the school curriculum. These resources include: STUDY GUIDES designed to bring the study of specific shows into the classroom; MTI REHEARSCORES® which provide unlimited rehearsal accompaniment via an easy-to-use, fully interactive computer program on disk; professional TV SPOTS allowing companies to affordably advertise on television in local markets; LOGO PACKS to aide in poster and program design; TRANSPOSITIONS-ON-DEMAND to allow flexibility in casting and musical key changes; and VIDEO CONVERSATIONPIECES™ featuring video seminars with artists such as Martin Charnin, Stephen Sondheim and Scott Ellis discussing the creation of their shows from inception to production.

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Musicals are America's premiere contribution to the theatre and MTI is firmly committed to supporting and nurturing a musical theatre that will continue to develop and flourish into the next century.





Music by
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About *Strike Up the Band*

Strike Up the Band was the first of a group of American shows and revues of the 1930's that took the bold step of satirizing problems confronting the United States: the Depression and the fear of another World War. Joining forces with playwright George S. Kaufman, George and Ira Gershwin created an innovative form of American musical theatre that bravely commented on real-world issues. With George Gershwin's lilting music, Ira Gershwin's witty and well-crafted lyrics, and George S. Kaufman's biting anti-war book, the creative team used musical comedy conventions for social satire—a new concept on a scene dominated by anything-for-a-laugh musicals.

When the show was first produced in 1927, its topics of man's inhumanity, absurd militarism, and misguided patriotism appeared to be of little interest to a country still filled with hopes for peace and a healthy economy. As a result, *Strike Up the Band* closed out of town. However, following the Depression of 1929, the mood of the country had shifted; the Gershwins' adventurous work was welcomed on Broadway in 1930.

Strike Up the Band went far beyond the conventional boy-meets-girl, star-centered Broadway show common in the 1920's. The book of *Strike Up the Band*, the first to be written by a major playwright rather than a musical theatre bookwriter, was the central organizing element of the show. The score was written to serve the needs of the book; it included Gilbert and Sullivan-inspired patter and chorus response numbers, and had musicalized act openings and finales.

Strike Up the Band is a comic fantasy combining emotion with dark social overtones. It comments on collusion among government, the military and industry; tariffs and taxes; presidential advisers; and the wave of intolerance that swept the country after World War I.

The show uses closely integrated ballads, rhythm songs, comedy songs, and marches to create satire tempered with warmth and wit. A turning point in American musical theatre history, *Strike Up the Band* delivers a powerful message that continues to have tremendous relevance for Americans more than six decades later.

Characters in Strike Up the Band

HORACE J. FLETCHER—the owner of the Horace J. Fletcher American Cheese Company.

JOAN FLETCHER—Horace J. Fletcher’s daughter.

JIM TOWNSEND—A reporter for The Gazette.

MRS. DRAPER—A society woman.

ANNE DRAPER—Mrs. Draper’s daughter.

TIMOTHY HARPER—The foreman of the Horace J. Fletcher American Cheese Factory.

COLONEL HOLMES—A confidential adviser to the President of the United States.

C. EDGAR SLOANE—The manager of the Horace J. Fletcher American Cheese Factory.

GEORGE SPELVIN—A mysterious figure who dresses in workman’s clothes.

CHORUS

Plot Synopsis

ACT I, SCENE 1

A group of factory workers at Horace J. Fletcher's American Cheese Company in Hurray, Connecticut sing "Fletcher's American Cheese Choral Society," a satiric comment on the virtues of singing at the start of every work day. They explain that management encourages them to vocalize every morning on the theory that "if we're happy, work is snappy." They are joined by their foreman, Timothy Harper, their manager, C. Edgar Sloane, and the company's owner, Horace J. Fletcher, who insist that the workers are "contented as cows" to be working for such a grand institution that nourishes humanity.

After the workers leave, Mr. Fletcher tells Harper and Sloane how excited he is by the 50 percent tariff that the President of the USA has just imposed on every pound of imported cheese. They recount the wonderful events taking place around the country to commemorate National Cheese Week. They recall that Mr. Fletcher began the company with only a pound of cheese.

Harper leaves to urge the workers on to increase production. Sloane demands that Mr. Fletcher encourage his daughter Joan to become Sloane's wife; otherwise Sloane intends to reveal some information about Mr. Fletcher's evasion of income taxes.

Mrs. Draper, a society woman, and her daughter, Anne, appear as Mr. Fletcher orders Sloane out of his sight. Mrs. Draper wants to start the City Air Movement for Country Children, a fund to send poor country children to the city for two weeks every summer. She has an obvious romantic interest in Mr. Fletcher, and her attention makes him very nervous. He leads her off for a tour of the factory. Anne and the factory foreman, Timothy Harper, embrace frantically and kiss. They are madly in love, but her mother has forbidden her to see him. Anne suggests that they get married before she becomes an old hag. They sing "Seventeen and Twenty-One," recalling their meeting, and lamenting how quickly they are aging.

After Timothy and Anne leave, Sloane appears to tell Mr. Fletcher that Switzerland is protesting the new tariff on imported cheese. Sloane is dispatched to find the President's confidential adviser, Colonel Holmes, and enlist him in the fight to hold on to the tariff. Joan Fletcher appears and demands that her father call a reporter from the local paper to task for publishing a derogatory story about her. The reporter, Jim Townsend, enters to get information about the cheese tariff story. Anne runs out before he sees her. Mr. Fletcher suggests that Jim wait for Colonel Holmes to arrive. He shares his life story, "A Typical Self-Made American," with Jim.

Joan confronts Jim, who admits writing the negative newspaper article to force her to pay attention to him. He says he couldn't help himself; it was spring outside and he had to react ("Meadow Serenade").

George Spelvin, a stranger dressed in a workman's uniform and carrying a box of tools, enters. He says he has come to repair the telephone. His actions are highly unusual;

soon he and Mr. Fletcher, who has never seen him before, are laughing together and tearing up business letters. When Mr. Fletcher is called away, Spelvin begins to act furtive. Mrs. Draper and Anne enter. Mrs. Draper and Spelvin appear to recognize each other, as Sloane races on with a group of workers. They announce the appearance of Colonel Holmes and his Marine escort with the song "The Unofficial Spokesman," which explains that the source of his great power is his refusal to say anything.

SCENE 2

Scene 2 is set in Mr. Fletcher's private office. Holmes and Fletcher are discussing the importance of maintaining the cheese tariff. Holmes agrees that a war might do the trick and would also give him the material for a book. Mr. Fletcher agrees to pay for the war and give the government 25 percent of the profits. Holmes agrees to name the conflict the Horace J. Fletcher Memorial War.

SCENE 3

Scene 3 takes place a few weeks later, outside the Fletcher home. The Chorus sings "Patriotic Rally," explaining that they are now Fletcher's Get-Ready-For-War Choral Society. Mr. Fletcher introduces Timothy Harper as the Captain of the troops and Colonel Holmes urges the troops on to victory over Switzerland. Everyone marches off to await Switzerland's response to a series of American demands.

Joan Fletcher and Jim Townsend enter. Jim confesses that he is against the war because he hates cheese. Joan says the man she loves would be proud to go to war. When Jim asks if there is such a man, she replies by singing "The Man I Love." He joins her in the song and they confess their love for one another. He agrees to go to war for her. Joan leaves and Sloane appears. He informs Jim that he intends to marry Joan. They leave as Timothy and Anne enter, arguing. She wants to get married before he leaves for the war. Spelvin appears and leads the chorus in "Yankee Doodle Rhythm."

After the crowd disperses, Mrs. Draper and Mr. Holmes meet. They get drunk together. He begins spilling confidential information to her. Mr. Fletcher enters. Holmes leaves and Mrs. Draper confesses her feelings for Mr. Fletcher ("Seventeen and Twenty-One Reprise").

Jim tastes some of Fletcher's cheese, and tells Joan he can't go to war to defend it because it is Grade B. The crowd enters and Mr. Fletcher announces the final insult to the USA. Switzerland has spelled America with a small a. In "Finaletto: Act I," Jim tries to alert the crowd to the fact that Fletcher's cheese is only Grade B. A heated argument ensues. When a red light flashes to indicate that war has been declared, the crowd turns on Jim. They discover that he is wearing a Swiss watch and order him arrested as a spy.

After the crowd marches off, the Very Patriotic League, which consists of Mr. Fletcher, Sloane, Colonel Holmes, and Mrs. Draper, meets. They dress in small hoods that resemble those worn by the K.K.K. They decree that anyone who doesn't go to war has to be twice as patriotic as anyone who does. They decide that everyone at home should save cheese wrappers. They agree to get rid of all "dangerous" references to

Switzerland such as “Swiss Family Robinson.” A telegram arrives announcing that Iceland is declaring war on both sides. The Swiss want to hold the war in Switzerland. The League considers the advantages of having the war on American soil like the Civil War. They agree that holding it in Switzerland will be great for tourism and plan to get D.W. Griffith, an important film director, to stage the battle. They decide to procure some great battle music from a popular composer. The League tries Jim and decides to force him to fight. Anne runs in to announce the arrival of the troops with Timothy at their head. The men march off singing “Strike Up The Band”; Mr. Fletcher announces Joan’s engagement to Sloane.

ACT II

Scene 1 takes place someplace in Switzerland. Against a background of bloody battle music and gunfire, we see a group of soldiers sitting on rocking chairs on a hotel lawn. They are knitting. Joined by a chorus of Swiss girls, they sing “Oh, This Is Such A Lovely War,” a satirical description of their military life, which includes tea with their officers and feather beds.

Timothy Harper, who leads the soldiers, warns them that Mr. Fletcher is about to appear with the Board of Directors of the war and a group of tourists. The group includes Colonel Holmes, Sloane, Mrs. Draper, Anne, Joan and The Fletcher’s-Come-Look-At-The-War Choral Society. Fletcher asks Tim to supply a bit of war action to make the tourists happy. Jim appears in a kitchen policeman’s uniform. Sloane humiliates Jim in front of Joan, much to her distress.

Mr. Fletcher complains to Timothy that the war is a disaster and has left him broke. He demands to know why there is no war for the tourists to see. Timothy says that they can’t find the enemy. Holmes and Fletcher insist that Timothy start selling American supplies to the Swiss army to make a profit because the Americans aren’t buying enough. They also demand “even a little” battle. Fletcher tells Holmes he is running out of money and asks if the USA could loan him some. Holmes then admits that the President doesn’t even know the war in Switzerland is going on.

Fletcher recruits the mysterious Spelvin to be a General, and orders him to win the war. General Spelvin goes off to look for his army. Joan and Jim share their sadness over the path their lives have taken because of Jim’s need to stand up for his ideals (“Hoping That Someday You’d Care”).

General Spelvin meets some soldiers who complain to him about the quality of the desserts—and the fact that their buttons are being cut off their coats. They march off as Mrs. Draper enters. Spelvin says she reminds him of an exotic dancer he once knew and encourages her to dance for the troops instead of reciting inspirational poetry to them. She is awkwardly trying to dance when Anne appears. Mrs. Draper, who doesn’t think she can catch a man if she is a grandmother, makes Anne promise not to get married before she does. Anne then tries to play matchmaker for her mother with Colonel Holmes by suggesting that Mrs. Draper is wealthy. Timothy appears and complains about life in the Army (“Military Dancing Drill”).

Joan tells her father she can't marry Sloane; she loves Jim. Mr. Fletcher says that unless they proceed as planned, the war will fail. Jim tries to tell Mr. Fletcher how to end the war, but is ignored. Mrs. Draper appears and tries to seduce Mr. Fletcher. He is avoiding her as Colonel Holmes enters and makes reference to her millions. Suddenly, both Mr. Fletcher and Colonel Holmes are interested in Mrs. Draper. They all sing "How About A Man?"

General Spelvin manages to snip two buttons off of Sloane's coat. Jim tells Spelvin to yodel and deceive the Swiss army into thinking they are being called home to lunch; then the enemy can be engaged. Sloane and Jim have a confrontation. Jim calls everyone onto the stage. He displays the buttons Sloan has been cutting off the American uniforms ("Finaletto: Act II"). Everyone demands Jim be taken to the guardhouse for making false accusations as they hear yodels and gunshots. Spelvin appears to announce that a yodel won the war. Mrs. Draper reveals that she is not rich and is instantly dropped by Mr. Fletcher and Colonel Holmes. Jim marches off—a hero. Ann and Joan, both thwarted in love, offer to shoot each other (Reprise: "The Man I Love.")

Scene 2 begins with the soldiers, who are returning to the USA on a ship, singing "Homeward Bound." Mr. Fletcher and Mrs. Draper, both seasick, meet at the ship railing. They fall in love and collapse into each other's arms.

Scene 3 takes place in Mr. Fletcher's ballroom. Everyone is home again. The girls are waiting for the soldiers to return ("The War That Ended War"). Jim and Timothy lead the soldiers into the ballroom. Mr. Fletcher announces his intention to produce cheese in red, white, and blue in the future. He declares Jim a hero. Jim introduces a little old Swiss lady, who identifies Sloane as the head of the Swiss Secret Service. Jim reveals that Spelvin is a member of the American Secret Service. Sloane was cutting the buttons of the soldiers' coats so they would catch pneumonia; he was also guilty of using Grade B milk in Fletcher's cheese. Jim demands that Mr. Fletcher agree to a League of Cheeses to prevent further wars and announces his intention to marry Joan.

Holmes appears to announce that Russia wants the tariff on caviar cut down. Instantly, the ensemble is declaring its intention to fight ("Finale Ultimo").

Themes and Topics to Explore

Our study guide focuses on a wide-ranging list of themes and topics suggested by *Strike Up the Band*. Below, you'll find avenues for exploring each theme and topic. They take the form of *Questions* - designed to prompt in-class discussions before and after viewing or reading the show, and *Assignments* - designed to be researched and written out of class.

Satire

The term *satire* describes a dramatic or literary work that uses wit and ridicule to reveal our follies. Authors who write satirically hope to have a positive impact on their audiences and institutions by packaging critical commentary in a clever and humorous way.

QUESTIONS/DISCUSSION IDEAS

- How do George S. Kaufman and the Gershwins attempt to use satire to rid their world of evil?
- What are some examples of good-natured, fun-poking satire in *Strike Up the Band*? What are some examples of biting, angry satire?
- The song "Strike Up The Band" was written to be a mocking, satirical statement of the show's theme and to set up the show's tone. However, it has since been accepted as a sincere patriotic march. Comment on this irony. How is it possible that a work written with satiric intent can be re-interpreted this way?
- Where can satirists be found in contemporary America? Who are some of the most important satirists in our day?
- *Caricature* is a form of satire where words are used to describe a person or circumstance in a ludicrous manner. Find an example of caricature in *Strike Up the Band*.
- *Exaggeration* is a form of satire where words are used to expand the limits of the truth. Where does this appear in *Strike Up the Band*?

ASSIGNMENTS/RESEARCH OR WRITING PROJECTS

- Find examples of satire in today's movies, print, TV or radio. Discuss these satirical treatments in depth.
- Write a satirical essay about a social or political situation that concerns you.
- Mrs. Draper's suggestion that she is heading a campaign to send country children to the city is a satiric comment on do-gooders. Experiment with applying the same kind of reverse logic to a concept that seems positive on the surface.
- Write satirically about an incident in your own life.

America in 1927

To understand a satirical work, you have to be familiar with the time and situations being satirized.

ASSIGNMENTS/RESEARCH OR WRITING PROJECTS

- Research 1927 as a year in American history. What events of importance happened in the preceding decade? What events immediately followed?
- List specific events, political trends, social situations, and personalities that you think Kaufman and the Gershwins are satirizing.
- Pick a year from another decade of American history. List the events, trends, situations, and personalities who could be satirized.
- Research America in 1930. What had happened between 1927 and 1930 to explain the much more positive reception the public gave *Strike Up the Band* in 1930?

Strike Up the Band and Big Business

Horace J. Fletcher is a vivid caricature of an American big businessman.

QUESTIONS/DISCUSSION IDEAS

- The song “A Typical Self-Made Man” details the steps that must be taken by a go-getter in business. What are these steps? Do you think this song is still relevant today?
- Why did George S. Kaufman choose to make Horace J. Fletcher the king of a cheese empire?
- National Cheese Week and Fletcher’s efforts to connect cheese to the national well-being are satirical barbs at public relations. What are some similar ploys used by contemporary companies in their public relations and advertising campaigns?
- How are Fletcher’s workers personified? How do they express the company “philosophy?” How do the Gershwins use their opening anthem throughout the show to demonstrate the inability of these workers to think for themselves?

ASSIGNMENTS/RESEARCH OR WRITING PROJECT

- Investigate the history of war profiteering in American history. Select a war profiteer and write a profile of him, comparing him to Horace J. Fletcher.

Strike Up the Band and Taxes

QUESTIONS/DISCUSSION IDEAS

- What is a tariff? How does the tariff issue set off the war with Switzerland in *Strike Up the Band*?
- Are tariffs still an issue in America? Relate the imaginary battle with Switzerland over cheese to America's contemporary concerns about imports.
- C. Edgar Sloane attempts to blackmail Horace J. Fletcher in Act I by threatening to reveal his tax evasion. Discuss the irony in the suggestion that Fletcher is a tax evader.

ASSIGNMENTS/RESEARCH OR WRITING PROJECTS

- Explore the history of tariffs in America. Describe one incident when tariffs had political repercussions such as the one in *Strike Up the Band*.
- What recent industries have been impacted by tariff issues? Profile one of them and the consequences of tariffs on its profitability and its workers.
- What is your own position on the tariff issue and imports in general? Why? How do you see the tariff issue changing in a shifting global political structure?

Strike Up the Band and the Role of Political Advisers in American Politics

The character of Colonel Holmes is patterned after Colonel House, a real-life adviser to President Woodrow Wilson.

QUESTIONS/DISCUSSION IDEAS

- What advice does Colonel Holmes give on how to reach the top in politics in his song "The Unofficial Spokesman?" What relevance does the song have to contemporary politics?
- Who are the advisers surrounding our current President? How do they compare to Colonel Holmes?
- What is the role of a Presidential adviser? Are advisers necessary? Why? Do such advisers also exist on other levels of government? Do your Mayor and Governor have advisers? Do you know who they are? Should you?
- Should a President be allowed to select a "crony" as an adviser? Are advisers subjected to same kind of scrutiny as cabinet members? Should they be?
- When can a presidential adviser become dangerous? Do we know enough about the advisers to those in power today?
- Does the President play a role in *Strike Up the Band*? Comment on the fact that Colonel Holmes tells Mr. Fletcher that the President doesn't even know there is a war going on.

ASSIGNMENTS/RESEARCH OR WRITING PROJECTS

- Investigate the history of Colonel House's role in the administration of President Woodrow Wilson. Can you find parallels to his actions and the actions of Colonel Holmes in *Strike Up The Band*?
- Choose another President of the United States and investigate his main advisers. Describe how they influenced him and policies made during his Presidency.
- Do an in-depth study of one current or recent Presidential adviser. If you were going to write a satirical essay or song about this adviser, what characteristic of his or hers would you focus upon?

Strike Up the Band and Diplomacy

ASSIGNMENTS/RESEARCH OR WRITING PROJECTS

- What was the actual posture of Switzerland in world affairs in 1927? Why do you think George S. Kaufman chose Switzerland as the enemy country?
- What was the nature of United States diplomacy in 1927? What specific diplomatic blunders might Kaufman have been commenting upon in spoofing United States relations with Switzerland?

Strike Up the Band and War

The authors' anti-war views, and distaste for the men who lead us into war, are quite evident in *Strike Up the Band*.

QUESTIONS/DISCUSSION IDEAS

- How does America become involved in war in *Strike Up the Band*? Is there any real threat to freedom? Why are the people so easily led into war?
- How are words used to lure people into supporting the war?
- Under what circumstances is war justified? Discuss the wars in which America has been involved during the past decade. Were they justified? Would you have been willing to risk your life to participate in these wars?
- Discuss Horace J. Fletcher's offer to pay for the war and share the profits with the government if the war is named after him.
- Discuss the decision to hold the war in Switzerland because it would be good for tourism.
- What is Kaufman satirizing by his comment that the war should be staged by D.W. Griffith and have battle music written by a great composer?
- What did the disappearing buttons represent?
- Discuss Horace J. Fletcher's willingness to sell supplies to the other side.

ASSIGNMENTS/RESEARCH OR WRITING PROJECTS

- What is militarism? How is militarism satirized in *Strike Up the Band*?
- What is jingoism? How is jingoism satirized in *Strike Up the Band*?
- The attitudes towards war reflected in *Strike Up the Band* were largely shaped by World War I. What were the causes of World War I? Did the American people support the war? Was there disagreement in the country about our involvement in the war?
- What kinds of casualties and losses did the United States experience in World War I?
- What the last conflict in which America was involved preceding this war? How did it differ from World War I?
- How did Americans form their opinions about the War? Where did their information about the War come from?
- Discuss Kaufman's decision to depict war as a tea party where the enemy appears no more anxious to fight than the American troops.
- At the end of *Strike Up the Band*, the crowd is willing to plunge head on into another war with Russia over caviar, completely forgetting their recent jubilation over the end of the last war ("The War That Ended War"). What warning for the future was Kaufman presenting? What deeper statement about human beings and war does this ending make?

Strike Up the Band, Vigilantes and Patriotism

QUESTIONS/DISCUSSION IDEAS

- Once war is declared, the crowd suddenly turns on Jim and decides that he is a spy because he is wearing a Swiss watch. What deeper problem is this action satirizing?
- The crowd also suggests attacking books with the word "Swiss" in their title. What broader social problems do such suggestions indicate in *Strike Up the Band*?
- Why does the Very Patriotic League wear small hoods? Whom do they represent? What are some of their actions?
- What is patriotism?
- Who should have the right and responsibility to evaluate what is patriotic behavior and what is not?
- Do you believe that you are patriotic? Why? How do you express your patriotism?
- How is patriotism defined by Jim Townsend, Horace J. Fletcher, Colonel Holmes, Mrs. Draper and other characters in *Strike Up the Band*?

ASSIGNMENTS/RESEARCH OR WRITING PROJECTS

- Research and discuss periods in American history when the individuals were suspected of being spies because of apparent connections to other countries.
- Research episodes of book banning in the United States. Were any of them in response to war?
- Research the Ku Klux Klan in America prior to 1927. What “America First” organizations were prominent before, during, and after World War I?

Strike Up the Band and the Plight of the Idealist

Jim Townsend is an idealistic young man who stands up for his convictions in *Strike Up the Band*.

QUESTIONS/DISCUSSION IDEAS

- Describe how Jim stands up for his ideals in Act I. What are the personal consequences of his actions? What are the consequences to the public for doubting Jim’s integrity?
- Does Joan Fletcher stand behind Jim? Discuss the issue of adhering to personal scruples when it interferes with your chance for personal happiness and/or the personal happiness of others.
- What societal forces are pitted against Jim?
- By allowing Jim to triumph, what statement are the authors making?

ASSIGNMENTS/RESEARCH OR WRITING PROJECTS

- Describe an incident in your own life or in the life of a friend when you or your friend stood up for your ideals. What were the consequences?
- Discuss whether the society you live in encourages or discourages young people to defend their ideals under trying circumstances.
- Do you believe an individual should be forced to fight in a war if his conscience dictates otherwise?

Quick Takes: Additional Ideas for Discussion and Writing

- Why is Mrs. Draper so determined that Anne not marry Timothy? Does she appear to object because he is a worker and not a society man? What does her daughter do to try to advance her own wedding plans? Trace Mrs. Draper through *Strike Up the Band*.
- Contrast the couples Timothy and Anne, and Jim and Joan. In addition to supplying warmth and humanity to the biting world of the piece, the couples’ relationships are very different. What are their respective problems? How do they overcome them?

- Trace George Spelvin through *Strike Up the Band*. Discuss the ease with which he becomes what everyone in the piece needs him to become at any given moment without ever disclosing his identity.

Strike Up the Band as Musical Theatre

QUESTIONS/DISCUSSION IDEAS

- Would *Strike Up the Band* have been as effective as a straight play without music?
- What other kinds of subject matter like the issues raised in *Strike Up the Band* do you think can be effectively presented as musical theatre?
- Prior to *Strike Up the Band*, musical theatre composers and lyricists were rarely concerned with how their contribution connected to the structure of the musical's book. In what ways did the Gershwins use music and lyrics to heighten the meaning of Kaufman's book?

ASSIGNMENTS/RESEARCH OR WRITING PROJECTS

- *Strike Up the Band* has been described as a turning point in the history of the American book musical. What is a book musical? What are some examples of great book musicals?
- Who were some of the great musical comedy librettists writing in 1927? What were the subjects of some of their shows?
- Investigate the famous British writing team Gilbert and Sullivan. Explore how they used their shows as a vehicle of political expression. Look at a Gilbert and Sullivan show and compare similarities in style with the music and lyrics for *Strike Up the Band*.
- Select one of the following songs from *Strike Up the Band*:

"Fletcher's American Cheese Choral Society"

"Seventeen and Twenty-One"

"A Typical Self-Made American"

"Meadow Serenade"

"The Unofficial Spokesman"

"Patriotic Rally"

"The Man I Love"

"Yankee Doodle Rhythm"

"Strike Up The Band"

"Oh, This Is Such A Lovely War"

"Hoping That Someday You'd Care"

"Military Dancing Drill"

"How About A Man?"

"Homeward Bound"

"The War That Ended War"

Summarize the contents of the song. Discuss:

- a. What do we learn about the world in which *Strike Up the Band* takes place from this song?
 - b. What do we learn about the character or characters who sing the song and their personal philosophies?
 - c. What do we learn about the larger themes of the show from the song?
- Can you think of another place in the show where a song might fit? What would a title for the song be? Who would sing it? What would it be about? What kind of music would it have? Try to write a few lines of the song lyric or music (or both!).

Plan Your Own Satirical Musical

- Select a contemporary current event or political issue and plan your own satirical musical theatre work around it.
 1. Tell a story that you think needs telling now. Set your story in the present, the past, or the future. Set it anywhere in the world or in another universe.
 2. Decide what kind of music your characters will sing. How will their music be influenced by your setting? Would the characters dance? How and why?
 3. How will you bring the human element into your satire and add warmth to the story as the Gershwins did?
 3. Outline the story of your musical. Write some dialogue for the characters. Try to write the opening scene of your show.

—Or—

- Plan an updated treatment of *Strike Up the Band*. If you were going to tell this story in the present, where would it take place? What new environment would you select for the Cheese Factory? How would you update the characters? What social issues would still be relevant? What social issues would you add? What kind of music would you use to express the ideas in the score?

Critical Analysis

ASSIGNMENTS/RESEARCH OR WRITING PROJECT

- Write a review of a performance of *Strike Up the Band*. You may wish to include any combination of the following elements in your review:
 1. Did the show hold your interest? Why or why not?
 2. Describe how the story was presented to the audience. What was the dialogue like?
 3. What was the structure of the story? Was there a single story or multiple stories? How did the multiple stories connect? Was anything about the story unexpected? How did the story begin and end?
 4. Describe the way music and lyrics worked in the show.
 5. Describe the sets, costumes, lighting, and musical accompaniment. How did these elements add to the meaning of the show?
 6. Discuss the effectiveness of the performers.
 7. Discuss the ideas presented in the show. Analyze their importance to your reader.
 8. Explain why your reader should make an effort to see the show.

Appendix

By Deena Rosenberg, author of *Fascinating Rhythm: The Collaboration of George and Ira Gershwin* (Dutton, 1991).

The following background material on *Strike Up the Band* and resource lists are designed to enrich your exploration of the Themes and Topics.

About the Creators

GEORGE S. KAUFMAN, the prolific American playwright, director, screenwriter and newspaper columnist, was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on November 14, 1889, and began his writing career as a columnist for various papers. Along with such celebrities as Dorothy Parker, Ring Lardner, and Robert Benchley, he was one of the famous participants in the Algonquin Round Table of the 1920's. Before teaming with the Gershwins for the political trilogy, he was the author of such Broadway plays as *Merton Of The Movies*, *Dulcy*, *Beggar On Horseback*, *The Coconuts* (starring the Marx Brothers) and a musical, *Be Yourself* (with some songs by Ira Gershwin). Kaufman also directed many of his own scripts. After writing *Strike Up the Band* with the Gershwins in 1927, he went on to write the Marx Brothers' film *Animal Crackers* (he also wrote the Brothers' 1935 classic *A Night At The Opera*). He collaborated with Morrie Ryskind on his revision of *Strike Up the Band* in 1930 and on two more political operettas with the Gershwins, *Of Thee I Sing* and *Let 'em Eat Cake*. Kaufman also directed the latter two works.

Other books for musicals include *The Band Wagon* (1931) with composer Arthur Schwartz and lyricist Howard Dietz, and *I'd Rather Be Right* (1937; co-written with Moss Hart and with composer Richard Rodgers and lyricist Lorenz Hart). His Broadway hit *Dinner At Eight* (co-written with Edna Ferber) was made into a now-classic movie. Forty-eight films have been made from plays he wrote or directed, including *You Can't Take It With You*, *The Man Who Came To Dinner*, and *The Solid Gold Cadillac*. He worked again with Ira Gershwin as co-bookwriter (with Nunnally Johnson) for the musical *Park Avenue* (score by Arthur Schwartz) in 1946. His last contribution to Broadway was the book for the 1955 musical *Silk Stockings*, with music by Cole Porter. He died in 1961.

GEORGE GERSHWIN was born in Brooklyn on September 26, 1898, and began his musical training when he was 13. At 16 he quit high school to work as a "song plugger" for a music publisher and soon he was writing songs himself. "Swanee" (lyrics by Irving Caesar), as performed by Al Jolson, brought George his first real fame and led to his writing a succession of 22 musical comedies, most with lyrics by his older brother, Ira. The Gershwins' shows include *Lady, Be Good!* (1924), their first hit, and also Fred and Adele Astaire's first Broadway hit; *Oh, Kay!* (1926), Gertrude Lawrence's first star vehicle in which she introduced "Someone to Watch over Me"; *Girl Crazy* (1930); a political trilogy, *Strike Up the Band* (1927; revised, 1930), *Of Thee I*

Sing (1931; the first musical to win the Pulitzer Prize) and *Let 'Em Eat Cake* (1933). With Ira, George also wrote four film scores, including *Shall We Dance* (1937) for Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. In the late Twenties George read DuBose Heyward's novel *Porgy*, and immediately saw it as the basis of an opera using jazz and blues. *Porgy And Bess*, with a libretto by Heyward and lyrics by Heyward and Ira, opened in New York in October 1935.

Besides writing for the theater and films, George was a composer of major concert hall works including *Rhapsody In Blue*, *Concerto In F*, *An American In Paris*, *Second Rhapsody*, and *Three Preludes For Piano*. George played his piano works in numerous national tours with major symphonies. He died suddenly of a brain tumor on July 11, 1937, when he was not quite 39.

IRA GERSHWIN, the first songwriter to be awarded the Pulitzer Prize, was born in New York City on December 6, 1896. In 1917 *The Evening Sun* published his first song lyric ("You May Throw All the Rice You Desire, But Please Friends, Throw No Shoes"). Four years later Ira enjoyed his first major stage success, *Two Little Girls In Blue*, written with another Broadway newcomer, Vincent Youmans. In 1924 Ira and his brother, George, created the smash hit, *Lady, Be Good!* and went on to continue their remarkable collaboration through a dozen major stage scores and four film scores, producing such standards as "Fascinating Rhythm," "The Man I Love," "'S Wonderful," "Embraceable You," "I Got Rhythm," "But Not for Me," "They All Laughed," "A Foggy Day," "Love Is Here to Stay," and others. Ira was proudest of his lyrics to the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Of Thee I Sing* (1931), the middle work of a trilogy of satiric operettas written with George S. Kaufman and Morrie Ryskind, which also included *Strike Up the Band* (1927; revised, 1930) and *Let 'Em Eat Cake* (1933). During his long career, Ira also enjoyed productive collaborations with such composers as Harold Arlen ("The Man That Got Away"), Vernon Duke ("I Can't Get Started"), Kurt Weill (*Lady In The Dark*), Burton Lane, and Jerome Kern, with whom he created his greatest song hit of any one year, "Long Ago and Far Away." Ira Gershwin died on August 17, 1983, in Beverly Hills, California, when he was 86.

About Strike Up the Band: Creation, Cultural Context and Craft

At first glance, the collaboration between the satiric playwright George S. Kaufman and George and Ira Gershwin seems an unlikely one. Kaufman was not overly fond of music, particularly in his own shows (though he had co-authored an occasional musical comedy libretto, including *Be Yourself* in 1924, for which Ira co-wrote the lyrics). One of the famous Kaufman wisecracks has him reluctantly consenting to Ira's request to reprise one of the Gershwins' songs—"if you let me reprise one of the jokes." In part, Kaufman associated music with love scenes, which were anathema to him; the Gershwins, on the other hand, had become masters of the musical comedy ballad, with such hits as "The Man I Love" (1924) and "Someone to Watch over Me" (1926).

Nonetheless, as he began to write it, Kaufman felt *Strike Up the Band* would need music to make it work, and when presented with the opportunity to work with Kaufman, George and Ira immediately agreed; he became a collaborator with whom they wanted to work more after the political trilogy. Before George's death in 1937, the Gershwins were planning a musical with Kaufman and Moss Hart; also, Ira, with composer Arthur Schwartz, later did the score to *Park Avenue* (1946) with a book by Kaufman and Nunnally Johnson.

In fact, Kaufman and the Gershwins had a lot in common. Like the Gershwins, Kaufman played a key role in the development of the urban sensibility in the twenties. "In play after play," says critic Harold Meyerson, "Kaufman took on America's emerging commercial civilization, the inanities, cruelties, and idiocies of its professions, its culture, its government—occasionally [and here the Gershwins did not follow] its people themselves." The prototypical Kaufman hero was the bewildered innocent who became the inadvertent cog in some vast wheel, though Kaufman also helped create more direct assaults on the bourgeois order. In 1925, he wrote the Marx Brothers' first hit, *The Coconuts*, a play later made into a film, with Morrie Ryskind as uncredited co-author—which, incidentally, has comedy songs by Irving Berlin. Kaufman's assault on the world of propriety proved to be an ideal vehicle for the zany comedians who were co-creating a whole new theater of the absurd. "Kaufman," Groucho Marx once said, "gave me the walk and the talk."

Like the Gershwins, Kaufman was in, but not entirely of, the world of popular culture. Like Ira, he was a close observer of society's ever-changing clichés; indeed, *Dulcy* (1921, co-authored with Marc Connelly), Kaufman's breakthrough show, had as its lead character a walking compendium of bromides of the day. In *June Moon* (1929), Kaufman and Ring Lardner followed the career of a complete yahoo through Tin Pan Alley; in *Once In A Lifetime* (1930), he and Moss Hart traced the career of another through Hollywood. Both works depict a commercial culture that is shallow, capricious, and plain stupid. And yet it was a world Kaufman himself never really escaped, even though he worked at—and defined—its highest elevations. "His work remains the criticism of an insider," writes Meyerson, "and the particular form that criticism characteristically took—the wisecrack—undermines but does not overthrow the conventions of the Broadway romantic comedy"—much as the Gershwins' blue note subverts and enriches but does not overthrow the conventions of Broadway romantic song. Only once during his long career did Kaufman produce a script that he felt pulled no punches. It was his book to *Strike Up the Band*.

In this show, Kaufman took a much grimmer look at war than any that had yet succeeded on the American stage. It was even harsher and more cynical than, say, *What Price Glory?* (by Laurence Stallings and Maxwell Anderson), which had been well-received the year before. In this case, Kaufman felt that the kind of satire on war that he had in mind would be greatly enhanced by music and lyrics.

Strike Up the Band aims its barbs at the collusion among government, business, and the military, at tariffs, at taxes, at presidential cronies who become government advisers. The chief target is the wave of jingoism and intolerance that swept the United States in the period during and after the First World War.

The show treads a “thin line between parody and sincere feeling,” in Eric Salzman’s words. The Gershwins’ diversified score is largely responsible for achieving the balance. The brothers used ballads, rhythm songs, humorous patter numbers and marches, placing them in such a way that their differences served dramatic ends. Those characters invented to caricature large institutions, such as corporations or government, or to represent corruption, bureaucracy, or incompetence, sing comic-operetta or parody songs. Those caught in the madness, the average man and woman, sing jazz-inflected, modern, American theater songs.

The show comes across like a theatricalized political cartoon. However, *Strike Up the Band* also conveys a sense of real people trapped in something larger—a theme still resonant today. The parasitic element of the show is exemplified by Horace J. Fletcher’s entrance song, “A Typical Self-Made American.” This is a patently Americanized variation of several Gilbert and Sullivan songs, most notably “I Am the Captain of the Pinafore,” and “Ruler of the Queen’s Navee” from *H.M.S. Pinafore* and “The Very Model of a Modern Major General” from *The Pirates Of Penzance*. In the latter two songs, as Ira put it, the “person singing has gotten ahead by not doing much of anything.”

Perhaps the most obvious reference is the melody to “He is a typical, typical, typical...,” which is almost identical to *Pinafore’s* “so give three cheers and one cheer more....” However, despite the British model, the substance of the song is American, making fun of the Horatio Alger myth and the politics of American businessmen.

Strike Up the Band includes several other entrance patter songs, among them “The Unofficial Spokesman,” who proclaims: “Like a Massachusetts, Massachusetts resident / Who once became a, once became a President, I never, never, never, never say a word.”

In comedy songs that rely on fast, clever word play, a complete lyric is generally written before the music. When Ira gave George the lyric, the first line went, “I am the unofficial spokesman of the U.S.A.”

George set the line but, according to Isaac Goldberg, was not satisfied at first:

As George considered the piece, something balked him.... As it stood, it was too closely in the Gilbert-Sullivan tradition—a topical, political song, visiting good-natured ridicule upon the singer and the song. It needed something to Americanize it, as it were.... George...would make that music undergo a sea change; it would be transformed from a British subject into an American citizen. How? By jazzing up its line; by repeating the word “unofficial” (and all other words that stood in a similar position) in a stammering rhythm that was unmistakably of this soil. This peculiar effect was the composer’s contribution to the words.

Thus the line became, “I am the unofficial, unofficial spokesman of the U.S.A.”

At the opposite extreme to the patter songs is “The Man I Love,” which George and Ira worked into the 1927 *Strike Up the Band* score because their producer, Edgar Selwyn, loved the song.

“The Man I Love” exerted a strong musical influence on the score, helping to make it unified in powerful and paradoxical ways. In *Strike Up the Band*, the motif that begins

"The Man I Love" is transformed into a song about the fever of war. The notes that begin the refrain of "The Man I Love," to the words "Someday he'll come along / The man I love," are similar to those that begin "Strike Up the Band," to the words "Let the drums roll out / Let the trumpet call!" Though George probably made these musical connections unconsciously, having a motif associated with love turn up as the basis of a song about a war is an ironic musical comment.

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