

ANYTHING GOES - THE MAIDEN VOYAGE

Damaged both by Depression and the new "talkies", no fewer than 83% of Broadway shows were financial failures in the 1931-32 season. But then, with the New Deal and the National Recovery Act promising employment and future prosperity and the end of crime-infested Prohibition, on 5th December 1933 New York came back to life. The blossoming of Broadway came a little later, but it did come. *Anything Goes* (1934) personifies perhaps more than any other show, the new optimism of post-Depression America.

Anything Goes was produced by Vinton Freedley. Having dissolved a debt-ridden partnership with Alex Aarons, (another Broadway producer), Freedley had narrowly escaped his creditors. Lazing on a fishing boat, he began to conceive his next project about a group of eccentric characters aboard a cruise ship bound for England. He envisaged a small-scale show with book and lyrics by Jerome Kern, Guy Bolton and PG Wodehouse. Kern was destined not to work on the show and his place was taken by Cole Porter: Bolton and Wodehouse, despite living in Europe would eventually complete the trio.

The custom was to build an original show around popular stars of the day. Freedley chose the comedy team of William Gaxton and Victor Moore and the young Ethel Merman, all of whom were currently enjoying considerable success in Gershwin musicals. He journeyed to Europe to meet his writers and hired Howard Lindsay in the USA to direct the show and make any editorial changes that may prove necessary. By mid-August, Freedley received the Bolton-Wodehouse manuscript and Porter score; the stars were signed in mid-September and a tryout was planned before bringing the show to New York in late October.

The original plot included a fake bomb and other hazards for the characters to overcome. It was full steam ahead until, on 8th September, to the horror of New Jersey bathers, the cruiser *SS Morro Castle* burst into flames off the coast. The fire spread with terrifying rapidity and casualties were high. The burned-out hull was washed onto shore where it became something of a tourist attraction. This disaster necessitated the



The burned-out *Morro Castle* on the beach at Asbury Park.

total scrapping of the original book in order to remove any suggestion of an explosion at sea; something that would have been considered in very poor taste and might well have harmed the show's ticket sales.

Rehearsals were postponed and Russel Crouse, humorist and one-time journalist, was drafted in to work around the clock with Lindsay in order to rescue the show. The first time these two worked together, they were also responsible for scripting six other musicals including *The Sound of Music*. There was one small restriction: the sets for *Anything Goes* having already been built, the plot still had to take place on a ship!

number of songs were changed or deleted, most notably, "Easy to Love" (consequently first sung by James Stewart in the film *Born to Dance* - 1936).

And so, the original script came to be written, literally as rehearsals were taking place. Few script changes were therefore needed although a

The original run was for 415 performances (or 420, depending on your source). Shows of this era were written for their time with little thought for their longevity. This was, of course, also well before the time of photocopiers and it was quite usual that, following its initial run, the scripts and band parts would be packed in a box and forgotten. Such is the fate of the original *Anything Goes*. In order to bring it to modern audiences, the show has undergone extensive revision and restoration. This is both to make it accessible to new audiences and to fill in for where the materials are simply lost.

The latest of these, (almost unrecognisable from the original and continuing the tradition of importing songs from other Porter musicals e.g. "Friendship", "It's De-lovely"), was made by John Weidman and Timothy Crouse - son of Russel. This version, prepared for the New York revival of 1987, is the one you will see today.