



A Playgoer's Guide

"There's no business like show business like no business I know...
There's no people like show people, they smile when they are low."



Annie Oakley

Annie & Bill

The story of Annie Oakley and Buffalo Bill's Wild West show is a fictionalized account of female sharpshooter Phoebe Anne Oakley Moses, often known as "Little Sure Shot."

As a youngster, Oakley learned to shoot in the woods of Darke County. During hard times, she helped support her family with the game she caught. Her career as a sharpshooter started at age 17 when she defeated the noted marksman, Frank E. Butler at a competition in Cincinnati, Ohio. The two eventually married and traveled with the Buffalo Bill Show for 17 years (1885 - 1902). Oakley performed throughout the United States and Europe. Queen Victoria of England was quite impressed with her abilities, and on one occasion the crown prince of Germany encouraged her to shoot a cigarette from his mouth. At 30 paces, she could slice a playing card held edgewise. She could shoot holes through coins at a similar distance. It was said that she could even "scramble" eggs in midair. At the height of her career, she was one of the most well known cultural icons in the United States. A railroad accident in 1901 partially paralyzed her, but she continued to tour regularly until her death. – (Ohio Biography Web site [<http://ohiobio.org/oakley.htm>]

Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show

The show itself consisted of a series of "historical" scenes interspersed with feats of showmanship, sharp shooting, racing, or rodeo style events. Native Americans figured prominently in many of the scenes, often shown attacking whites in historical situations with Buffalo Bill or one of his colleagues riding in and saving the day.

The exact scenes changed over time, but were either portrayed as a "typical event" such as early settlers defending a homestead, a wagon train crossing the plains, or a more specific event such as the Battle of the Little Big Horn. Of course, to recreate the battles and scenes exactly would be impossible, but Buffalo Bill used his poetic license often to glorify himself (Slotkin, p. 170). He was, however, very concerned with recreating the West that he loved as accurately as his life experiences

saw it, and tried to maintain at least accurate detail in his Wild West shows. (Slotkin, p. 170).

– Slotkin, Richard., "Buffalo Bill's 'Wild West' and the Mythologization of the American Empire." *Cultures of United States Imperialism*.

The show

This musical first opened at the Imperial Theater on Broadway May 16, 1946, and was especially written for Ethel Merman. The production ran for 1147 performances, and became the third longest running musical of the 1940's. Ethel Merman returned to her original role of Annie Oakley in 1966 with the Lincoln Center revival. 1999 was a big year for this lively musical, as it became a hit once again on Broadway. This revival starred Bernadette Peters as Annie, and was somewhat updated for modern times. It won two Tony Awards: one for Best Revival and the other for Best Actress in a Musical. The Marquis Theater on Broadway opened this musical in 2001 with a new star; Reba McEntire played the leading role of Annie Oakley.

When *Annie Get Your Gun* is performed today, most theatre companies adopt a more modern score - over the years, various elements of racism and sexism have been eliminated, and some songs have been repositioned to make more sense in context. Some of these revisions may not reflect the 1880s setting and societal values, but the songs have been generally well-received by modern audiences and the musical is considered more culturally appropriate. "I'm an Indian Too" has been cut from many performances, as have "I'm a Bad, Bad Man" and "Colonel Buffalo Bill," and many songs have been revised, all in the name of political correctness.

The music

The best-known songs from *Annie Get Your Gun* are the rousing "There's No Business Like Show Business" (now a sort of theme song for Broadway) and the head-to-head duet "Anything You Can Do." "Old Fashioned Wedding," another show-stopping favourite, was written by Berlin for the 1966 revival. Many of the songs have become standards on their own.

Of all the musicals currently in town, *Annie Get Your Gun*, *Kiss Me Kate* and *The Music Man* are the only examples of the true Golden Age -- a time when Broadway's songs still topped the Hit Parade, and its deities rivaled Hollywood in newsworthy starshine. It was the time when the Broadway musical had total confidence in itself and its method. The best of that time are now classics - and here is the golden chance to see one of them in a bright new setting, still handsome and riding tall in the saddle.

– Clive Barnes, *New York Post*



This guide was produced by the
Annie Get Your Gun Task Force

<http://people.stthomasu.ca/~annie.student.stu/mainpage.htm>

St. Thomas University English 2223:
From the Page to the Stage

James Bowles Lise Doucette
Martina Flanagan Chris Hoffman
Melissa Miller Jamie Morrison
Russ Hunt

