

# George Abbott & Richard Pike Bissell

lyrics and music by

Richard Adler & Jerry Ross



## A Playgoer's Guide

"It's a show that takes a whole barrelful of gleaming new talents, and a handful of stimulating ideas as well, and sends them tumbling in happy profusion over the footlights. *The Pajama Game* has a fresh and winning grin on its face from the outset." --Walter Kerr, *New York Herald Tribune* (May 14, 1954)

## The Show



Based on the novel *7-1/2 Cents* by Richard Bissell, *The Pajama Game* first opened on Broadway May 13th, 1954 at the St. James Theatre and ran for 1,063 performances, ending on November 25th, 1956 at the Shubert Theatre. It was directed by George Abbott and Jerome Robbins and choreographed by Bob Fosse. This original production received three 1955 Tony Awards for Best Musical, Best Featured Actress in a Musical (Carol Haney as Gladys) and Best Choreographer (Bob Fosse). There was also a *Pajama Game* movie produced in 1957, which featured most of the original Broadway cast.

The play was revived in 1973 at the Lunt-Fontanne Theatre December 9th, 1973, but did not receive the same overwhelming success as the original, and closed in February of 1974 after 65 performances and with no awards. Then in January of 2006, *The Pajama Game* saw its second revival at the American Airline Theatre. Starring Harry Connick, Jr. as Sid, and Kelly O'Hara as Babe, this Roundabout Theatre Company production won even more awards than the original 1954 production. This included a Tony for Best Choreography (Kathleen Marshall) and Best Revival of a Musical, as well as the Outer Critics Circle Award and Drama Desk Award for Best Choreography. The show closed in June of 2006 after 129 performances, nearly all of which were sold out.

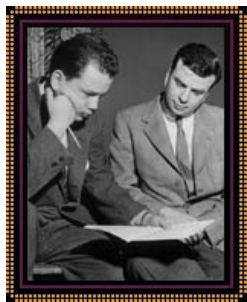
*The Pajama Game* is a comedic story about the lives of workers in the Sleep-Tite Pajama Factory. The workers union, headed by the character Prez, is demanding a seven and a half cent raise, which management, headed by Hasler, does not want to give. A strike is imminent. In the meantime, the union is causing trouble with production. They sew buttons on loosely, mismatch sizes, and stage a 'go-slow'. In the midst of the struggle between the workers we become involved in the personal lives of the employees. Love blossoms between Babe, the grievance committee head, and Sid, the new factory superintendent, Hines, the popular efficiency expert, is in love with Gladys, the company president's secretary, and Prez is more than friendly with some of the working girls.

## The people who made it



*Pajama Game* was based on the book *7½ Cents*, which was written by Richard Pike Bissell. Among other things, he worked in the garment factory founded by his grandfather in Dubuque, Iowa. Bissell's greatest success came when he wrote a humorous novel based on the activities at the garment factory. *7½ Cents* changed the Bissell's lives. The family moved to the East coast so he could turn the book into a musical play for Broadway. It was a smash and soon became a motion picture. This experience provided the fodder

for his novel *Say, Darling*, which also became a Broadway musical. Equally important in creating the hit show was legendary Broadway director George Abbott, who co-wrote the script and directed it. Abbott was a Broadway showman who became one of the most versatile and successful theatre craftsmen in the modern era of American stage. Abbott wrote, produced and directed some of the most notable Broadway plays, including not only *The Pajama Game*, but also *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* and *Damn Yankees*. He died at the age of 107; at the time of his death he was dictating changes to the script of *Pajama Game* for a revival.



Richard Adler was born on Aug 3, 1921 and became a lyricist and a composer; he ended up producing many Broadway musicals as he was introduced to music at a young age. Richard had joined the navy before he began his musical career. He was part of the navy recruits for WWII but left it after the war to pursue a music career. At this point of his life, Adler met Jerry Ross who also was very interested and involved in music. Ross, born in 1926, was recognized

early for his musical abilities. Ross became a lyricist and a composer and produced many Broadway musicals, including *Pajama Game*. Ross was born in the Bronx and grew up with a great appreciation for music. Though he died at the age of 29, he was extremely productive, writing more than 250 songs in addition to his theatre work.

## The unions: some background

The Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America (ACWA) was founded in 1914 in revolt against the established men's clothing workers union. The roots of this conflict date back to the general strike of Chicago, when a spontaneous strike by a handful of women workers led to a citywide strike of 45,000 garment workers in 1910. That strike was a bitter one and pitted the strikers against not only their employers and the local authorities, but also their own union. The ACWA went on to become one of the most important and powerful industrial unions in American history. It is known for social activism and for the numerous strikes and rallies of garment factory workers for their rights, namely in Chicago in the early 20th century. (Perhaps coincidentally, this union was run by a man named 'Sid', Sidney Hillman, for the first thirty years). As the ACWA grew in numbers between the 1920s and the 1950s, it also expanded its scope, pioneering social welfare programs for its members that included health insurance, a health center, banks, and even a housing cooperative.

"The last new musical of the season is the best. It is *The Pajama Game*, which opened at the St. James last evening with all the uproar of a George Abbott show. . . . Richard Adler and Jerry Ross have written an exuberant score in any number of good American idioms without self-consciousness. Beginning with an amusing satire of the work tempo in a factory, they produce love songs with more fever than is usual this year; and they manage to get through a long evening enthusiastically in other respects also. -- Brooks Atkinson, *The New York Times* (May 14, 1954)

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