



The Guide to Musical Theatre

THE CIVIL WAR

An American Musical Event (a Musical) in Two Acts. Book and lyrics by Frank Wildhorn, Jack Murphy and Gregory Boyd. Music by Frank Wildhorn.

Opened 22 April 1999 at the St. James Theatre and closed 13 June 1999 after 61 performances. (35 previews)

Authors' note: Many voices inspired the writing of THE CIVIL WAR: Sojourner Truth and Abraham Lincoln; Walt Whitman, Sullivan Ballou and Frederick Douglass; Hanna Ropes and R. E. Lee; Henry Kyd Douglas (2nd Virginia) and Henry Pearson (6th New Hampshire), among others.



SYNOPSIS

Drawing on letters, diaries, firsthand accounts, and the words of Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass and Walt Whitman, "The Civil War" is a thrilling, gut-wrenching and awe-inspiring "dramatic theatrical concert" that covers the enormous emotional landscape of the most difficult test our nation has ever endured. This epic thematic revue, reminiscent of Ken Burns' acclaimed documentary, puts a human face on the greatest tragedy of American history, exploring not only the experiences of the soldiers and leaders who fought for their way of life and the lovers and families they left behind, but also the hopes and fears of the slaves whose freedom was at stake. It passionately asks us to consider our

A flexible, multi-ethnic cast of dramatic singers shines in a parade of emotional, showstopping numbers which encompass the range of American popular music, from Gospel, Folk and Country to Rock to Rhythm and Blues, in a riveting score by Frank Wildhorn, one of Broadway's most popular tunesmiths.

STORY

Act One

Lochran appears with a guitar in front of an oversized, war-torn American flag, circa 1862, and begins to sing ("Brother, My Brother"). Midway through, the flag flies away, revealing the company in tableau. In voiceover, we hear Lincoln speak, telling us that a nation divided against itself cannot stand and that the Union must defend itself.

Two brothers step out of the tableau. Sam and Nathaniel Taylor. Through the song ("A House Divided"), they disagree about which side of the argument to join and agree to go their separate ways, neither happy with the other. They step back into the tableau as Bill and Sarah step out, continuing to sing. Despite her protests, Bill tells Sarah that he must honor their forefathers by defending the country that they established. Captain Billy Pierce then steps out, claiming that he will defend Virginia, his land and home, against Union occupation. They all step back into the tableau, which is now a less-harmonious version of its former self.

The soldiers burst onstage, and the tableau is broken. Young recruits from both the North and the South shout war slogans and mock their opponents ("By the Sword / Sons of Dixie"). They boast of their strength and envision the glory that the battle will bring them.

The scene changes to a slave auction, where the Auctioneer sells off a young black man who stands,

head bowed, following the Auctioneer's barked commands. The slaves sing of the ordeal of being sold as merchandise, separated from those whom they love, and of the terrible life that they endured on the plantations as we are shown projections of tortured slaves. Frederick Douglass prays "the Lord God send / all his wrath down upon what he knows isn't right" ("The Peculiar Institution"), and the slaves trickle away, the Auctioneer shouting, "Sold!" with each of their exits.

Again, the scene changes. Bill's wife, Sarah, writes a letter to him from their Minnesota farm. She tells him how she is learning to run the farm alone, but confesses that she is still "Missing You (My Bill)."

The captains of the opposing sides, Pierce and Lochran, confront their thoughts on the eve of battle ("Judgment Day"). They each pray, asking for God's mercy for sending men to their deaths in battle. As the sun rises, the battle begins and the brother, Nathaniel Taylor, is killed. Lochran and Pierce think of all of the letters that they have written to mothers whose sons have died in battle and the faces of all of the soldiers whom they have lost.

With the battle over and the dead taken to be buried, Pierce, a captain in the Confederate Army, sings of his homeland ("Virginia"). He dreams of the plantation of his youth and wonders if the way of life that he has known has gone forever.

Frederick Douglass steps forward and introduces himself. He says that, although others claim that the nature of the conflict is to preserve the Union, he believes that the abolition of slavery is the actual driving force behind the rebellion, asking if the political freedom discussed in the Declaration of Independence will be extended to Negroes ("Freedom's Child").

Douglas exits, and a Union Captain steps forward for a montage from the front lines. He writes to his wife to tell her how the war has desensitized him to human casualty, just before a Union Soldier writes to his mother. He is near death on the battlefield and wants her to tell his father that he died as a man and with honor ("Tell My Father"). The Union Captain finishes his letter as a Confederate Captain and his soldiers step forward to confess that, although they'll probably die, they will proudly walk through heaven's doors in the Confederate uniform ("This Old Gray Coat").

Back in Minnesota, Sarah, Bill's wife, talks of the situation in the hospital where she is working as a nurse and of the young men whom she sees come and go ("I Never Knew His Name").

Frederick Douglass appears again, questioning how much longer "victories" in which 22,000 men are killed can go on. A gravedigger laments, wondering ("Father, How Long?") until he can sing freedom's song. Almost as if in answer, Harriet and the other slaves gather to sing about how they will soon be free ("Someday").

Act Two

In the darkness, we hear the haunting voices of soldiers singing ("Judgement Day – Reprise"). Rain appears on the scrim as the lights reveal the Confederates trudging forward through the winter ("How Many Devils"). Time passes on endlessly as they march. The exhausted soldiers wonder if the war that they thought would be so easy to win will ever come to an end. Winter turns into a blazing summer as the Union soldiers pick up the song. Their strength is ebbing and they dream of home, knowing all the while that they are likely never to return there.

A single soldier, a captain in the Confederate Army, studies the area. He realizes that he has never really looked at the countryside around him, the land that is his home. Even as he longs to linger, he knows that "I'll Never Pass This Way Again."

Elsewhere, Abraham Lincoln sits alone in the White House in the winter of 1862, candlelight beaming from his window. Harriet, a slave, wonders what he is thinking, comparing the light to the their hopes and dreams ("Candle in the Window").

The sound of artillery is heard. As time stands still, both a wounded Confederate soldier and a Union soldier sing the thoughts that run through their minds ("The Day the Sun Stood Still"). They describes the endless sea of soldiers that converges in a mass of blue and gray, beneath a sun that seemed to blaze for days on end.

Bessie, a slave, appears, writing a letter to her husband, who has been sold to another owner. She tells him that she is going to escape on the Underground Railroad, but that she will find him ("Prayin' – Reprise").

Benjamin, a recruiter for the Underground Railroad, enters and sings of getting slaves to freedom across the "River Jordan."

Bill writes a letter to Sarah from the battlefield. He tells her how much he loves and misses her, that every time he closes his eyes, he imagines memories with her and, even now, his heart is there ("Sarah"). Immediately after, she receives a black-bordered condolence telegram; Bill has died in battle. She vows that she will struggle on to raise their son and survive in the midst of tragedy for "The Honor of Your Name."

The two armies are exhausted, dispirited and numb; they seem to blend into one group, marching endlessly. A Union Captain pulls out a letter from his wife. He hangs on to the thought that only thirty days remain until he can return to her aboard a "Northbound Train."

Elsewhere, Confederate soldiers amass and discuss the fate of defeat that they know is coming their way ("Last Waltz for Dixie").

Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, July 2, 1863. The two armies are waiting for dawn to break on the second day of the battle as the sun rises on a wall of mist and the two armies face each other. The Union soldiers train their guns on the Confederate line, hidden by the fog. Lochran stands apart, calling on his soldiers to give their utmost for "The Glory." Pierce emerges with his men, knowing "the time to stand has come at last... / the bridge is burned, the dye is cast." The battle commences; fog and smoke cover the stage, revealing only battle flags and bayonets. When the fog dissipates, the stage is covered in fallen soldiers.

A woman appears looking for a loved one, whom she finds among the fallen. She cradles him and sings as others arrive, also looking for their loved ones.

Frederick Douglas enters and gives narration to the events that followed; the surrender of the Confederacy, Lincoln's second inauguration... and subsequent assassination. Eventually, Lincoln's own voice takes over as the soldiers rise to return to the tableau from which they all began.

CAST:

Union Army:

Captain Emmet Lochran
Sergeant Patrick Anderson
Sergeant Byron Richardson
Corporal William McEwen
Private Conrad Bock
Private Charles Spencer
Private Nathaniel Taylor

Of the Confederate Army:

Captain Billy Pierce	Harriet Jackson
Sergeant Virgil Franklin	Liza Hughes
Corporal John Beauregard	Autolycus Fell
Corporal Henry Stewart	Auctioneer's Assistant
Private Darius Barksdale	Sarah McEwen
Private Cyrus Stevens	Violet
Private Sam Taylor	Mabel
Frederick Douglass	Mrs. Bixby
Clayton Tholer	Nurse
Benjamin Reynolds	Voice of President Lincoln
Exter Thomas	
Chorus of singers	

(The action is set during the American Civil War 1861-1865.)

MUSICAL NUMBERS:

Some songs performed in excerpt form.

ACT 1

1. A House Divided - The Citizens
2. Freedom's Child - Frederick, other Abolitionists
3. By the Sword/Sons of Dixie - The Armies
4. Tell My Father - Private Sam Taylor
5. The Peculiar Institution - The Enslaved
6. If Prayin' Were Horses - Clayton Tholer, Bessie Tholer
7. Greenback - Autolycus Fell, Mrs Bixby, Violet
8. Missing You (My Bill) - Sarah McEwen
9. Judgement Day - Captain Billy Pierce, Captain Emmet Lochran, Private Sam Taylor, the Armies
10. Father, How Long? - Clayton Tholer
11. Someday - Harriet Jackson, Bessie Tholer, Others
12. I'll Never Pass This Way Again - Voice of President Lincoln
13. How Many Devils? - The Armies

ACT 2

14. Virginia - Captain Billy Pierce
15. Candle in the Window - Harriet Jackson
16. Oh! Be Joyful! - Autolycus Fell, Sergeant Byron Richardson Private Conrad Bock, Private Charles Spencer
17. The Hospital - Mrs Bixby, Violet, Union Soldiers, Clayton Tholer
18. If Prayin' Were Horses (reprise) - Clayton Tholer, Bessie Tholer
19. River Jordan - Benjamin Reynolds, others
20. Sarah - Corporal William McEwen
21. The Honour of Your Name - Sarah McEwen
22. Greenback (reprise) - Autolycus Fell, Violet
23. Northbound Train - Captain Emmet Lochran
24. Last Waltz for Dixie - Captain Billy Pierce, Confederate Soldiers
25. The Glory - Captain Emmet Lochran, Frederick, Benjamin Reynolds, Full Company

In the subsequent national tour the order of musical numbers was substantially revised; added were

- Brother My Brother
- Old Gray Coat
- I Never Knew His Name
- The Day the Sun Stood Still

DISCOGRAPHY:

The Complete Works - Atlantic Theatre 83091-2

ORCHESTRATION

BASS; DRUMS; GUITAR; GUITAR 2; WIND CONTROLLER; KEYBOARD 2; VIOLIN/MANDOLIN