



## THE PRODUCERS: SYNOPSIS

(From the Music Theatre International official website)

### ACT ONE

The Producers opens on Shubert Alley on the opening night of a musical version of HAMLET called FUNNY BOY! produced by the indefatigable Max Bialystock. "It's Opening Night" sing the usherettes and as the first nighters enter they sing, "He's done it again....It's the worst show in town!"

We now see the tuxedo clad Max trying to figure out what went wrong in the self-serving song, "The King of Old Broadway." Max vows to be on the top again.

We now find ourselves in the once elegant and now shabby office of Max Bialystock. He has been reduced to living in his office and his sleep is interrupted by a knock on the door. Is it fate? No, it is a sleppy accountant named Leo Bloom who has come to do Max's books. Max forces Leo into the bathroom while one of his investors, Hold Me-Touch Me, an elderly lady, enters but withholds her check until Max plays one dirty game with her. The game is begun but Leo comes out of the bathroom and the little old lady leaves-at least until Thursday.

Max's books don't add up and Leo berated by Max pulls out his blue blanket and curls up on the floor into a fetal position. Max wonders, "They come here. They all come here. How do they find me?" Leo has discovered that Max had raised a hundred thousand dollars for FUNNY BOY! but only spent ninety-eight thousand leaving two thousand unaccounted for. Since the show was a major flop, Max convinces Leo to move a few decimal points around which will keep him from going to jail. After all, the IRS isn't interested in a show that wasn't a success.

Max takes the next step and tells Bloom they could find the worst play and director in town, raise two million (one million for each of them) and then with the worst actors in town produce a gigantic flop and go to Rio with the money. Max tries to convince the reluctant Bloom to follow his lead in "We Can Do It".

Bloom returns to Whitehall and Marks, his accounting office where he is berated for being six minutes late. Working as an automaton on his adding machine, Bloom realizes, with the help of fantasy gorgeous chorus girls that "I Wanna Be A Producer" where he can lunch at Sardi's, sport a top hat and cane, and sleep until half-past two-that is to say "I wanna be a producer....'cause it's everything I'm not." Leo leaves his job crying, "Stop the world, I wanna get on!"

Leo returns to Max and some time later they are discovered reading scripts trying to find the worst play ever written. Max finally finds it: SPRINGTIME FOR HITLER, A GAY ROMP WITH EVA AND ADOLF AT BERCHTESGADEN guaranteed "to close on page 4."

In the West Village at 61 Jane Street, the author of the play, Franz Liebkind, dressed in lederhosen and a German Army helmet, sings "In Old Bavaria" an ode to his homeland and his beloved Nazis even though he had "nossing" to do with the war. "Ve lived in the back. Right across from Svitzerland. All ve heard vas yodeling."

Franz won't sign unless Max and Leo join him in the Fuhrer's favorite tune, "Der Guten Tag Hop-Clop." They sing; he signs.

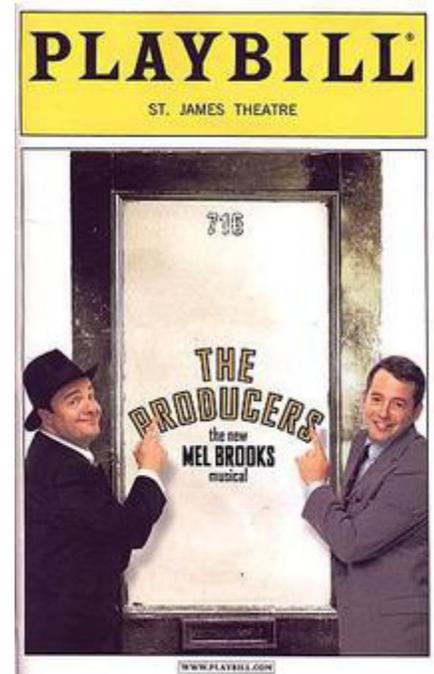
We now find ourselves in the elegant foyer and living room of Roger De Bris, the noted director. Carmen Ghia, his "assistant" is fielding his phone calls when Max and Leo enter. De Bris enters in a silvery full-length Art Deco gown. He tells Max that Liebkind's play is remarkable but too dark and depressing for him to direct. He tells them to "Keep It Gay." With the hope of a Tony Award and the ability to make SPRINGTIME FOR HITLER happy and gay, De Bris signs a contract.

Back in the office a gorgeous young Swedish girl named Ulla enters. She wants to audition and does with "When You've Got It, Flaunt It." Max offers her the part, even though Leo isn't sure there is one for her in the play. Max offers her the job of secretary-slash-receptionist until rehearsals begin.

Max explains to Leo that producers never put their own money into shows and that he has hundreds of little old ladies as investors. Max takes Leo into Little Old Lady Land with the song, "Along Came Bialy." He explains they were joyless and boyless, listing and sinking until he came along. Lots of little old ladies pushing walkers which make tap sounds give checks to Max, "the celebration of love..." The money has been raised and SPRINGTIME FOR HITLER is ready to be mounted.

### ACT TWO

Ulla has been busy and the office has been transformed into a miracle of Swedish "moderne" with everything painted a high-gloss white. Max gets cash from the safe and exits to pay the Shubert's rent for the theatre and leaves Leo and Ulla alone to sing, "That Face!" in which Leo and Ulla proclaim their love for one another.





## THE PRODUCERS: SYNOPSIS (continued)

(From the Music Theatre International official website)

On the bare stage of a Broadway theatre, Carmen Ghia is teaching a stage full of Hitlers to dance. They exit and a group of singing Hitlers take the stage. One is more awful than the next. Liebkind shows one how to sing "Have You Ever Heard the German Band?" and Max proclaims, "That's our Hitler!!" Liebkind is to play his hero!

It is now opening night and Max wishes everyone good luck but he is called up short because "It's Bad Luck to Say Good Luck On Op'ning Night." The more he is told how much bad luck it is to say it, Max insists on wishing everyone good luck. Ironically enough, when Liebkind is told to break a leg, he does, and with no understudy the show may have to be called off until Max tells De Bris he can do it. De Bris balks at this until Carmen tells him, "You're going out there a silly hysterical screaming queen and you're coming back a great big passing-for-straight Broadway star!!" With his Hitler moustache and his lucky Gloria Swanson mole De Bris exits to play the role of Hitler.

The next thing we see is the show stopping number "Springtime for Hitler." Including a squad of tap dancing storm troupers and follies girls with headdresses of giant pretzels, bratwurst, and beer steins, the number is tasteless, offensive, and totally hysterical. At the end of the dance section De Bris as Hitler sits at the edge of the stage a la Judy Garland and sings to the audience. This is followed by the entrance of Stalin, Churchill, and FDR who are defeated by our singing-tap dancing Hitler. The number ends with the storm troopers forming a swastika that rotates clockwise and chorus girls astride cannon.

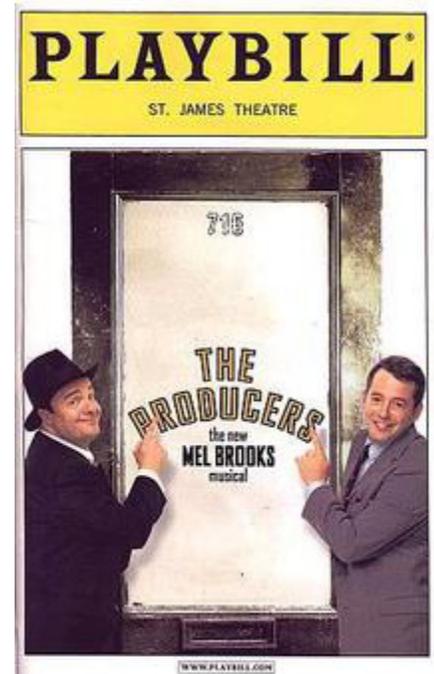
But the show, as tasteless and over the top it was, is a smash hit. Leo and Max (in "Where Did We Go Right?" sing, "The show was lousy and long, We did everything wrong, Where did we go right?" Leo takes the account books and is going to turn himself in when De Bris and Carmen enter soon followed by Liebkind brandishing a gun, furious that they have made fun of Hitler. Pandemonium ensues. The gun malfunctions but Max tries to convince Liebkind to kill all the actors. This way the show will have to close. Just at that moment the police break in and try to arrest the alleged shooter, Liebkind, who rushes offstage, crashes, and breaks his other leg. The cops arrest him and find the two accounting books on the couch. Max is arrested but Leo (who has been hiding all this time) is convinced by Ulla, who has just entered in a slinky gown, that he shouldn't go to jail but to take the whole two million and go to Rio, of course, with her.

In a holding cell a few weeks later, Max receives a postcard from Leo and Ulla in Brazil. Max sings he has been "Betrayed." After summarizing all that went before with snippet upon snippet of previous songs, he sings, "Just like Julius Caesar was betrayed by Brutus, Who'd think an accountant would turn out to be my Judas!"

In a courtroom, Max is about to be sentenced when Leo reappears calling himself a rat who deserted a sinking ship. He hands over the remains of the two million (less the cost of the hotel, airfare, and a large jar of cocoa butter) to the judge and in "Til Him" they re-avow their friendship. The judge, not wishing to break up such a beautiful friendship, sentences them both to five years in Sing Sing.

We find ourselves in Sing Sing at a rehearsal of PRISONERS OF LOVE, the latest production of Bialystock and Bloom. As the title song is being sung by real prisoners, a trustee enters with a pardon for Max, Leo, and Liebkind "for having- through song and dance- brought joy and laughter into the hearts of every murderer, rapist, and sex maniac in Sing Sing."

The set changes to the Broadway version of "Prisoners of Love" with Ulla and De Bris in leading roles. The show, a Shubert Alley sign proclaims, is now in its 4th smash year. Believe it or not, Max and Leo are now real (and successful) Broadway producers!





## DIRECTOR TERRY GRAZER: ON THE PRODUCERS, ZERO MOSTEL AND HAVING FUN WITH A SHOW

Terry Grazer's been planning to direct *The Producers* for over 40 years...an amazing claim, since the musical opened on Broadway only 8 years ago. But Terry, a Milwaukee theatre veteran and a favorite with Shorewood Players casts and audiences, is not one to take commitments lightly. He shared his thoughts on *The Producers* with Joe Da Via.

Joe Da Via: Before it was a Broadway musical, *The Producers* was a film comedy starring Zero Mostel and Milwaukee's own Gene Wilder. Which is your favorite?

**Terry Grazer:** They are two different works, with some common story points and jokes. The 1968 movie with Mostel and Wilder is amazing. Mostel's portrayal of Max Bialystock, a once-great Broadway Producer who is losing his mind, is pure comic genius. Wilder's nervous accountant is a career high point for him. When I saw the film with college friends in 1968, I told myself that I wanted to direct "Springtime for Hitler," the show within a show, the worst musical ever written, and the focus of Max's financial scam. I almost staged that one song in several musical reviews, but it was too big of a production number for a review format.

Then I saw the Broadway musical in 2001 in previews in Chicago. At first I was disappointed; I preferred the film. But by the middle of Act I, with the dancing pigeons, I was rolling in the aisle. Then I saw Ulla, Max and Leo's beautiful Swedish assistant, and the old ladies with the tap-dancing walkers, and the amazing "Springtime for Hitler," and I was hooked. I loved the stage musical, both the preview and the London cast. I'm glad they did the movie with Nathan Lane and Matthew Broderick, but to appreciate the show it needs to be seen as a live theatre musical. My goal is for the Shorewood audience to have that same feeling as when I saw it live, but with our own take on the show.

JDV: You talked about Max, Leo and Ulla. What other roles and scenes stand out for you?

**TG:** The roof scene, with Max, Leo, Franz Leibkind and his pigeons is a riot. Roger DeBris, the worst director on Broadway, his common-law assistant Carman Ghia and his creative team has the audience in stitches. Max's scene with one of his little old lady investors, "Hold Me -Touch Me" pairs a sweet lady with money and a crazed producer who deparately wants it. And the outrageousness of "Springtime for Hitler:" it is at once both a tribute to a Busby Berkeley musical and the worst subject for a dance number in history. If the audience isn't laughing and talking about the show as they leave the auditorium, we haven't done our job.

JDV: What would you say to an actor who's thinking about auditioning for *The Producers*?

**TG:** If you haven't seen the 1968 movie with Zero Mostel, see it. Also see the 2005 movie with Nathan Lane and Matthew Broderick. Don't try to imitate those performances, but you should understand the storyline. We'll explore the characters and may take a different approach to the roles. As Director, I collaborate with the actors; we'll use the best of what we develop together.

Unfortunately, there are no roles for children in *The Producers*. We need men and women of all ages. There is a lot of tap dancing, and all cast members need to be familiar with dancing or at least stage movement. We need six to 12 chorus girls who can tap dance. We also need actors to play about six older women. There are a lot of male roles. The actress who plays Ulla must be tall, be able to belt out a song, and be a "leggy" dancer. There are roles for non-singers.

When you prepare a song, don't prepare anything that's over 32 bars long. You can prepare a song from another show, but I may have the Music Director teach a song from this show.

I don't schedule rehearsals for Saturdays. My goal is to schedule rehearsals two weeks in advance; I won't call an actor for rehearsal and not use them. It's not a good use of their time. Number 1: we will definitely have a lot of fun with this show.

JDV: Is there special considerations for staging *The Producers* in Shorewood?

**TG:** The east side of Milwaukee has a large population with Jewish heritage, and I think they have a special appreciation for Mel Brooks, as will anyone familiar with his other films like *Blazing Saddles*, *High Anxiety* and *Young Frankenstein*. Also, we may temper the language a bit.

I'm excited to be directing the first community theatre production of *The Producers* in the Milwaukee area. We have a great theatre, and the Players have very strong production values. Some local theatres have resorted to recorded music or piano-only scores, but Shorewood invests in a full orchestra. Some groups cut corners with sets and costumes, but the Players invest in these as well. The Shorewood Players have steady audience numbers. And the Players support the show with publicity that few other community theatres in Milwaukee can match. Ask an actor who has performed with the Players; they know that the Players treat them well.





## THE PRODUCERS: HISTORY

by Karen Pogorelc

"Don't be stupid, be a shmartie! Come on join the Nazi Party!"

Most people probably thought they'd never hear that line in a musical theater song. But yet it's there, right in the middle of the show within a show..."Springtime for Hitler" A show in such poor taste, "it's got to be a flop!"

The Producers is the story of a failed Broadway producer and an accountant that scheme to produce a flop in order to cheat investors.

Broadway Producer Max Bialystock is aging and washed up. He survives by romancing old ladies in exchange for money, which he invests in his next "production". Leo Bloom, the accountant, is neurotic and shy. While examining Max's dismal accounting books, Leo comes up with the thought, "under the right circumstances, a producer could actually make more money with a flop than he can with a hit." Lucky for Max, Leo has always yearned to be a Broadway producer. He has little trouble convincing Leo to help him find the "worst musical script ever written". They find it in the seemingly awful "Springtime for Hitler: A Gay Romp with Adolf and Eva at Berchtesgaden" written by Franz Leibkind, an ex-Nazi who now raises pigeons.

Leo and Max then go down to the townhouse of Roger De Bris, the worst director in New York and a flamboyant homosexual. At first they have a bit of trouble convincing Roger and his partner/assistant Carmen Ghia that such serious subject matter is appropriate for musical theater, but after agreeing to change the ending, so that the Germans win World War II, they sign on.

Just as no action film is complete without a car chase, no musical is really complete without a beautiful, blond bombshell and The Producers does not disappoint. Along comes the lovely Ulla Inga Hansen Benson Yansen Tallen Hallen Svaden Swanson. She is an aspiring actress that quickly becomes Max and Leo's secretary and featured performer in their show.

The Producers had it's beginnings in a 1968 movie written and directed by Mel Brooks. The producer (Max Bialystock) was played by Zero Mostel and the accountant (Leo Bloom) was Milwaukee's own Gene Wilder. Although the movie won an Academy Award for Best Writing, Story and Screenplay, it received very mixed reviews. Negative reviews noted "bad taste and insensitivity" in devising a movie about two Jews conspiring to cheat theatrical investors with a tasteless Broadway show about Hitler. Others thought the movie was hilariously funny. Roger Ebert said it was one of the funniest movies ever made.

Thirty years later, producer David Geffen persuaded Mel Brooks to turn his movie in to a Broadway musical. Mel Brooks approached Jerry Herman (composer and lyricist for Hello Dolly and La Cage aux Folles) about writing the score to the show. Herman declined, saying that Brooks should do it himself, as he was a good song writer. Brooks composed the score by humming his melodies into a tape recorder. Then Glen Kelly, the musical arranger and supervisor, takes Brooks' simple 32-bar songs and turns them into "glorious Broadway show tunes."

Nathan Lane was cast as Max Bialystock and Matthew Broderick as Leo Bloom.

The show opened on April 19th, 2001 at the St. James Theater and ran for 2,502 performances, and won a record-breaking 12 Tony awards. It spawned a successful London production and a motion picture in 2005.

After the opening, The Producers broke the record for the largest single day box-office gross in theatre history, taking in more than \$3 million. Lane and Broderick left after several months (which is common for stars in Broadway shows). But the show then broke its own record in 2003 when Broderick and Lane's return went on sale, with over \$3.5 million in single day ticket sales.

Here are some fun and interesting facts about the original movie, Broadway Production and 2005 movie:

~ The name "Bialystock" is taken from a Polish city "Bialystok" Mel Brooks's ancestral home. The city was a major Jewish center in Eastern Europe until the Holocaust.

~The film may contain the first use of the term "creative accounting".





## THE PRODUCERS: HISTORY (continued)

by Karen Pogorelc

~Dustin Hoffman was set to play Franz Leibkind, but declined when he got the part of Benjamin in *The Graduate*. Brooks only allowed Hoffman the chance to go off to the audition for the film because his wife Anne Bancroft was in it, and Brooks was familiar enough with the role of Benjamin to know Hoffman was utterly wrong for it (as written) and would never be cast. (ha ha)

~Mel Brooks based the character of Max Bialystock on a real Broadway producer he knew who used to seduce little old ladies in exchange for checks that were supposedly to produce his latest play, which would usually be called "Cash."

~ Mel Brooks' original title for the film was *Springtime for Hitler* but the studio wouldn't allow it. They did say that they would allow *Springtime for Mussolini*. Brooks didn't like it and ended up calling it *The Producers*.

~The character Carmen Ghia is a reference to the Karmann Ghia which was a sports car marketed by Volkswagen, designed by the Italian Carozzeria Ghia, and built by German coach builder Karmann. Karmann Ghias were produced between 1955 and 1974.

~ Nathan Lane actually shaved the top of his head in order to create a realistic comb-over as a tribute to Zero Mostel.

~ During "*Springtime for Hitler*," film director Mel Brooks can be heard saying "Don't be stupid, be a smarty! Come and join the Nazi party!" He later dubbed the same line in the 2005 movie version.

