

EXPRESSO BONGO

Musical Numbers

Overture ~ Orchestra
Don't You Sell Me Down the River ~ James Kenney
Expresso Party ~ James Kenney
Nausea ~ Meier Tzelniker
Spoil the Child ~ Millicent Martin
Seriously ~ Millicent Martin
I Never Had it So Good ~ Paul Scofield
There's Nothing Wrong with British Youth Today ~ Chorus
The Shrine on the Second Floor ~ James Kenney
He's Got Something for the Public ~ Hy Hazell, Elizabeth Ashley, Susan Hampshire, Paul Scofield, Rosaline Haddon, Charles Gray
I Am ~ Millicent Martin
Nothing is for Nothing ~ Meier Tzelniker, Hy Hazell, Paul Scofield
We Bought It ~ Hy Hazell, Elizabeth Ashley
Time ~ Hy Hazell
The Gravy Train ~ Paul Scofield
Finale ~ Millicent Martin, James Kenney, Hy Hazell, Paul Scofield, and Company

On April 23, 1958, *Expresso Bongo* burst on the London theatre scene. A satire of the music industry, the show starred Paul Scofield, James Kenney, Millicent Martin, Meier Tzelniker, Hy Hazell, and Elizabeth Ashley. The show had a book by Wolf Mankowitz (*A Kid for Two Farthings*, *The Day the Earth Caught Fire*, *Casino Royale*) and Julian More (*Irma la Douce*), music by David Heneker (*Half a Sixpence*) and Monty Norman (the "James Bond Theme"), and lyrics by Julian More, David Heneker, and Monty Norman. The pop singer in the show was loosely based on Tommy Steele. The show had the misfortune to open at the same time as *My Fair Lady*, but unlike that high-toned musical, *Expresso Bongo* was decidedly low-life, gritty, and had a score mixed with pop and traditional musical theater songs. For its time, it was a fairly audacious and "different" kind of entertainment.

As the *Evening Standard* wrote, "*Expresso Bongo* at the Saville is a British musical whistling through a mouthful of bitter aloes. It is a rau-

cous, rhythmic paean of disgust aimed at the shoddy side of the entertainment business. In its misanthropic tour of the gutters of the West End, it washes up an unsavoury flotsam of sharp agents, talentless artists, love-starved women, greedy managers, shady café proprietors and dim debutantes. If they had a redeeming virtue among them it would be stolen off their backs – *Expresso Bongo* ought to become the first successful adult British musical since the end of the war." The performances, especially that of Paul Scofield, received critical kudos. While the show was obviously overshadowed by the mammoth success of Julie Andrews and Rex Harrison in *My Fair Lady*, it did reasonably well, well enough for film director Val Guest to obtain the rights and make a film of it the following year. Interestingly, the film plays the whole thing straight without a trace or hint of satire. The film version only retained a handful of the stage show's songs and added several new ones by composer Norrie Paramour and lyricist Bunny Lewis. It starred Laurence Harvey, Sylvia Syms, pop

singer Cliff Richard, and repeating his role and song from the stage show, Meier Tzelniker.

Divorced from its time and place, the score is really delightful, filled with snappy tunes, clever lyrics, and satirical over-the-top pop ballads of the era. After the show's run, it kind of just disappeared off the face of the earth, with only its cast album and film version keeping its memory alive.

The original cast album of *Expresso Bongo* was released in mono only by Nixa Records. That was reissued in the United States many years later with an especially bad LP and then CD transfer. For this new release, James Nelson has done a major remastering, bringing the original brashness and luster back to what was an excellent recording. We're also happy to include the EP of the Cliff Richard songs, along with cover versions of two other songs from the show as bonus tracks.

— Bruce Kimmel