

## CRY FOR US ALL

HOPEs were high for *Cry For Us All*. After all, it was adapted from a 1965 hit off-Broadway play, *Hogan's Goat*, by William Alfred, which played a healthy run of 607 performances at the Theater at St. Clement's Church, and featured a cast of actors that would soon be on their way to stardom – Faye Dunaway, Ralph Waite, Cliff Gorman, and Conrad Bain. Even the replacements would go on to great acclaim – Barnard Hughes and Richard Mulligan. More importantly, it was brought to you by the same composer and director of the smash hit, *Man Of La Mancha* – Mitch Leigh and Albert Marre – and it featured that show's leading lady, Joan Diener. Alfred did the book (along with Marre), and provided the lyrics along with Phyllis Robinson. But the out-of-town tryout was troubled and the show underwent many changes, including the beefing up of Miss Diener's role at the expense of other actors. One role, played by Margot Moser, and which, according to Ken Mandelbaum in his book *Not Since Carrie*, was crucial to the action of the show, was eliminated in total, and according to Mandelbaum, Diener's part got bigger and bigger as material was taken away from cast members Helen Gallagher, Tommy Rall, and Dolores Wilson. There was even a title change to *Who To Love* – that didn't last long and neither did the show.

Doing the show was composer Mitch Leigh's idea (he was also the show's producer along with C. Gerald Goldsmith). At first, Leigh thought he would make a film of the play, but after reading it several times, thought the material would really lend itself to musicalization. Albert Marre, Leigh's collaborator on *La Mancha*, agreed, and Alfred agreed to write the book (with Marre) and lyrics (with Phyllis Robinson, an advertising copywriter whose first and only Broadway show this was).

*Cry For Us All* opened on April 8, 1970 at the Broadhurst Theater where it played eighteen previews, opened to non-money reviews, and closed after nine performances. But that season was littered with musicals that shuttered quickly, including *Look To The Lillies*, *Georgy*, *Gantry*, *Buck White*, *La Strada*, and two slightly longer running flops, *Jimmy* and *Minnie's Boys*, and *Coco*, which at least managed to eke out a run of a year, based on the

star power of Katherine Hepburn. There were actually only two hit musicals that season – *Applause* and *Purlie*. Maybe a serious musical melodrama set in 1890 Brooklyn about the trials and tribulations of some power-hungry Irishmen just wasn't what the tired businessman of 1970 was interested in. Despite that, the show was nominated for two Tony Awards – one for best actor in a musical (Robert Weede) and one for set designer Howard Bay (also from the *La Mancha* team).

But the fact is, listening to the tuneful and sometimes operatic score holds many pleasures, especially as delivered by the brilliant Robert Weede, Miss Diener, and Steve Arlen, along with Miss Gallagher, Mr. Rall, and a large supporting cast. Leigh's score to *Man Of La Mancha* had been like a breath of fresh air on Broadway (and hearing it every time the show is revived, it's still like a breath of fresh air), and *Cry For Us All* is filled with his signature rhythms and meter changes and it affords Weede, Diener, and Arlen, meaty opportunities to dig in to his tuneful and soaring melodies.

Doing this CD is a special treat – first, because I'm such a fan of the composer, and second because putting out a CD with Robert Weede on it is more meaningful to me than you can possibly imagine. And you don't have to because I'm going to tell you why. I do hope you'll indulge a little personal remembrance of Mr. Weede, because meeting him changed my life and his generosity and kindness informed the kind of person that I've always tried to be.

### MEETING ROBERT WEEDE

It was back in either late 1965 or early 1966. I was in my first year of college, taking Theater Arts. All I wanted back then was to be a good actor and what I really wanted was to do musical theater. Growing up, one of my all-time favorite cast albums was the three LP set of *The Most Happy Fella*, starring Robert Weede. I played it to death, wore out several copies, and regularly sat with the lights off, letting that wonderful score and Weede's beautiful voice wash over me.

And so, when I saw that a theater-in-the-round in San Bernadino was doing the show and, more importantly, that two of its original stars would be recreating their Broadway roles – Mr. Weede and Art Lund – I bought a ticket for the closing Sunday matinee. I drove out there alone (a really long drive in those

days) and saw the show. Simply put, it was a superb production (directed by Ernie Sarra-cino), Art Lund and the large cast were fantastic, and Robert Weede – well, he gave the greatest performance I'd ever seen (okay, I was only seventeen, but to this day it's still the greatest performance I've ever seen). I went backstage, which was a makeshift tent-like area, and I asked if I could please meet Mr. Weede. It wasn't like today, where kids flock to the stage door of any show because that's become the thing to do – like a game – no, I was the only one back there. They asked me to wait, and a moment later Mr. Weede appeared, with that big, endearing smile of his. I told him that I thought his performance was magnificent and how much it had meant to me. He was very humble and thanked me for my words. He asked what I wanted to do and I told him I wanted to be an actor and he was just so kind and so supportive it actually took me aback.

He then asked me if I wanted to stay and see their final evening performance. I said, of course, yes, and he arranged a complimentary ticket for me – and then invited me to come backstage after and attend the cast party. The evening performance was even better, and, after the show, I went backstage and told them Mr. Weede had invited me to attend the party. He found me, introduced me to the other cast members and made sure I didn't feel awkward about being there. I've never forgotten it – that kindness, that wonderful gentle man – and I remember it whenever anyone e-mails me or comes up to me about my own work. I take the time to listen to them, and try to emulate his kindness and support and warmth. He's someone I will always remember with great affection – in those amazing moments backstage he taught me so much about humility and kindness, and there's not a day that goes by when I'm not grateful for having met him. So, doing this CD is more than a pleasure – it's a tribute to one of the finest singing actors I've ever seen, and one of the nicest human beings I've ever met.

— Bruce Kimmel