

GONE WITH THE WIND

Original London Cast Album

A musical of *Gone With The Wind*? Sounds crazy, no? But in the occasionally crazy world of musical theater, that's exactly what happened. Even crazier was the fact that its first production did not take place in Atlanta or anywhere else in the United States. No, its first production took place in Tokyo. Yes, you heard that right, Tokyo, where, in 1970, *Scarlett* (as it was then called) opened. With a book by Kazuo Kikuta and a score by the wonderful Broadway composer Harold Rome, and direction and choreography by the great Joe Layton, *Scarlett*, the four-hour musical in two parts, opened and was very popular, so popular in fact that producer Harold Fielding decided to mount a production not on Broadway, but in London, where costs were cheaper and where the show could be honed before heading to the Great White Way. If you've ever heard that original Japanese cast album, you know just how surreal it is to hear the supremely Southern Scarlett and Rhett singing in Japanese.

For the London production (now rechristened *Gone With The Wind*), Horton Foote (the playwright, and Academy Award-winning screenwriter of *To Kill A Mockingbird*) was brought in to adapt the book. Instead of a two-part four-hour musical, it was streamlined down to two-and-a-half hours, and since at least an hour of that was music, it didn't really leave a whole lot of time for character development – the hope, of course, was

that audiences were so familiar with the 1939 classic film that they would fill in the blanks.

That London production, starring June Ritchie as Scarlett O'Hara and Harve Presnell as Rhett Butler, opened in 1972 at the Drury Lane Theater. Reviews were, in some cases, surprisingly good, and the show ran a year. The *Evening Standard* raved, "Choreography and music are brilliantly blended in a storytelling exercise that never stops for breath. There are no artificially set numbers to halt the momentum of the tale and every precise dance number propels the action forward." "What a musical! Singing Scarlett is here to stay," said the *Daily Express*.

Producer Fielding was encouraged enough by the London production to schedule the show for a Broadway opening on April 7, 1974. Prior to that, the show would have a tryout with the West Coast Civic Light Opera, opening in Los Angeles at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion in August of 1973. This revised version of the London production starred Lesley Ann Warren as Scarlett, Pernell Roberts as Rhett, and Udana Power as Melanie. The reviews were horrible, and director/choreographer Layton made many changes during the LA and then San Francisco run. At that point, Fielding decided to cut his losses and cancel the Broadway run.

That was not quite the end of the story – there was one other production of the show in Dallas, directed by Lucia Victor, that then had a little three-city tour. And after that, the musical of *Gone With The Wind* was gone with the wind.

Thankfully, EMI made a cast album of the show, preserving the delightful and tuneful Harold Rome score. This CD was mastered from the original album masters housed at EMI in the UK.

But just to show you that crazy ideas sometimes never die, there was, hard as it is to believe, another musical version of *Gone With The Wind* that opened and closed quickly in the UK in 2008, directed by Trevor Nunn. The reviews for that version would probably make the Harold Rome / Horton Foote version seem like a masterpiece. And you know what – in its crazy, old-fashioned way, listening to this wonderful London cast album, you might just become a believer.

But I'll think about that tomorrow.

— Bruce Kimmel