

The Decline and Fall of the Entire World as Seen Through the Eyes of Cole Porter

Unless someone can prove otherwise, I do believe that *The Decline and Fall of the Entire World as Seen Through the Eyes of Cole Porter* may just be the longest title of a musical ever. I've searched and can find no other title that stretches out to sixteen words, while there are definitely some plays that match or even beat it. Ben Bagley opened his delightful revue, which he called a "revuesical" at the Square East Theater Off-Broadway in New York on March 30, 1965, where it ran for 273 performances. Porter's songs were perfect for the revue concept, and the audiences and critics ate the show up. The *New York Times* raved: "The most tuneful and witty musical in town... The show relishes Cole Porter. It feasts on his lively and lilting tunes, tunes that are so marked by the Porter dash and swagger that they are immediately recognizable even though one may never have heard them before. And it glories in his lyrics, that study flow of wit-to-wit combat at which he was an absolute master."

Bagley assembled a brilliant cast, including the divine Kaye Ballard, Harold Lang, Carmen Alvarez, William Hickey, and Elmarie Wendel. There was a second edition

of the show with the one and only Bobby Short and Dody Goodman, and Danny Meehan, Virginia Vestoff, Barbara Quinne, Jane Manning, and Carol Arthur, with musical direction by William Roy.

Then, rather unexpectedly, the show turned up in Los Angeles, not at a small Off-Broadway type theatre or cabaret space, but at the beautiful Huntington Hartford Theatre, which, at the time, mostly played home to the national tours of hit shows like *The Tenth Man*, *A Thousand Clowns*, *Advise and Consent*, *Beyond the Fringe*, *Stop the World – I Want to Get Off*, *The Odd Couple*, and many others. For the Huntington Hartford production, the show had a bigger set, a band, and a big star in Tammy Grimes (along with fellow cast members Edward Earle, Nagle Jackson, Bobo Lewis, and Sybil Scotford. The new musical arrangements and orchestrations were by the wonderful George Bassman (the orchestrator for the original Broadway production of *Guys and Dolls*, as well as the composer of the classic Sam Peckinpah film, **Ride the High Country**), with musical direction by Woolf Phillips. As in New York, audiences and critics loved the show. I can attest to this since I

saw it five times during its month-long run. It was sophisticated, delightful, very funny, and Tammy Grimes was brilliant in it, just as Kaye Ballard had been in New York.

The original cast recording was one of the early productions of record producer Thomas Z. Shepard. For the first CD release, Bagley added a bunch of bonus tracks from New York, live performances. The real treasure in the bonus section is Tammy Grimes singing "The Tale of the Oyster" from the Los Angeles production, and it gives you a taste of Bassman's orchestrations. For this new CD release, our ace mastering engineer, James Nelson, has spruced up the sound and we're delighted to bring this gem of an album to new listeners and those who may have missed it the first time around.

— Bruce Kimmel