

On December 1, 1968, *Promises, Promises*, the musical version of Billy Wilder and I.A.L. Diamond's *The Apartment*, opened at the Shubert and took Broadway by storm. The show was such a breath of fresh air, with its hilarious book by Neil Simon, and pop-sounding and brilliant score by Burt Bacharach and Hal David. When that overture began, you knew the sound of Broadway had just changed forever – it was electric in the best way. Within hours the show had received a love letter from Clive Barnes in the *New York Times*:

"Yes, of course, yes! The Neil Simon and Burt Bacharach musical *Promises, Promises* came to the Sam S. Shubert Theater last night and fulfilled them all without a single breach. In fact it proved to be one of those shows that do not so much open as start to take root, the kind of show where you feel more in the mood to send it a congratulatory telegram than write a review.

Neil Simon has produced one of the wittiest books a musical has possessed in years, the Burt Bacharach music excitingly reflects today rather than the day before yesterday, and the performances, especially from Jerry Orbach as the put-upon and morally diffident hero, contrive, and it's no easy feat, to combine zip with charm."

Other reviews were just as glowing. Richard Watts in the *New York Post* said, "A witty, sparkling musical." Walter Kerr, also in the *New York Times*, raved "The smartest, sunniest, most delightful new musical in town."

And on it went:

"A helluva show!" *Daily News*

"A super greased lightning hit. Hilariously funny!" *WABC*

"One of the happiest events on the Broadway stage in a long time. Truly funny musical." *United Press*

Simon's book, while being pretty faithful to *The Apartment*, is its own particular wonder – filled with classic Simon one-liners, and also a surprising amount of pathos. The score, of course, is Bacharach and David at their best. The show became an instant smash and ran for 1,281 performances. A London production, starring Tony Roberts and Betty Buckley (and Jack Kruschen, reprising his role from *The Apartment*), opened in 1969 and ran 560 performances. The cast recording won a Grammy, and the show produced several hit songs, including two for Dionne Warwick – "I'll Never Fall In Love Again," and "Promises, Promises" (she also recorded "Knowing When To Leave," "Wanting Things" and "Whoever You Are"). Bacharach himself covered five of the songs on his A&M album *Make It Easy On Yourself*.

Of course, the show had the usual trials and tribulations during its out of town tryout, and songs came and went, new songs went in, and the show got better and better. The story is told how the end of act one's "Turkey Lurkey Time" was more turkey than lurkey – it was originally just some gals dancing on some desks, and David Merrick came to the young Michael Bennett and told him he had to do something to turn the dud number into a showstopper. So, Michael Bennett did something – he not only turned it into a showstopper, he created one of the most memorable and thrilling showstoppers in the history of the Broadway musical. The audiences went wild for it in a way that simply doesn't happen anymore. The wonderful theatre journalist Peter Filichia re-

members well the Boston tryout, which he saw on both October 12 and 24. "It was easily the slickest and most sure-footed tryout I ever saw in Boston in the 15 years I lived there and was routinely seeing tryouts." He continues: "While there was a song called 'Hot Food' in the Boston *Playbill* it was already dropped by the time I first got there. 'I'll Never Fall In Love Again' was not in either in my first or second visit." There were a couple of really nice songs that got dropped along the way – both of which I got to record on the first two volumes of *Lost in Boston* that I produced – "Tick Tock Goes The Clock," and the gorgeous "What Am I Doing Here?"

One of the reasons the sound of the show seemed so innovative was that Bacharach brought in Broadway's first recording-type mixing board. Also his use of four pit singers doing back-up vocals was unique. The show's orchestrations were by the young up-and-coming Jonathan Tunick, who honored the Bacharach sound while adding a few wonderful touches of his own. He once said to me, "Bacharach taught me how to do a rhythm chart." In fact, I think it's pretty safe to say that the "sound" of *Promises, Promises*, paved the way for the "sound" of the Stephen Sondheim score to *Company* in 1970, with its use of pit singers and those same electric rhythms.

The show was nominated for seven Tony Awards, including Best Musical (it lost to *1776*), and took home the prize for Mr. Orbach (Best Actor) and Marian Mercer (Best Supporting Actress).

For several years there was talk of a film version of *Promises*, but it never materialized. The show was done at *Encores* in New York in March of 1997 (starring Martin Short, and directed and choreographed by Rob Marshall), and at *Reprise* in LA in May of 1997 (starring Jason Alexander). There have been a few productions in other venues over the years, but this thoroughly modern musical was generally considered dated and not with-it. Until *Mad Men*, that is. Then suddenly it seemed right for its first official Broadway revival, which opened in March of 2010, starring Sean Hayes and Kristin Chenoweth. To make its *Mad Men* connection stronger, the show was reset in the early 1960s, and then two other Bacharach and David songs were interpolated into the show – "I Say A Little Prayer" and "A House Is Not A Home" and from most reports did nothing to improve a show that didn't need the improvement.

This is the third CD release for the original cast recording of *Promises, Promises*. The first was issued on Ryko, and then that release was reissued by Varese Sarabande. However, neither of those releases were the actual cast album as released on LP – the original mix. Ryko remixed the album from the original eight-track edited session masters and that newly mixed album was also used for the Varese release. So, this is actually the first appearance of the Grammy award-winning original album mix – newly remastered, of course. The two-track album masters were in excellent shape. One interesting thing about the way in which this show was recorded: Normally, a show is recorded "dry" with only the room acoustic going to tape. If any reverb is needed to give the recording "air" and "presence" it is added during the mix and then printed to the two-track master as part of the mix. But *Promises, Promises* was recorded with reverb, presumably a "chamber"-type reverb chosen by Bacharach, Phil Ramone, and Henry Jerome. So, there is no changing the reverb if one goes back to the eight-track edited session tapes because it's right there on the tape.

But the *raison d'être* of this release was to present a second CD with a newly mixed version (from those original and great-sounding eight-track edited session masters) that, with today's technology, could finally fix most of the issues that plagued the original cast album. As most know, cast albums were always recorded in one day (it's still the same today, but there are a few shows that go to two and even three days), and the pressure was always on to get everything finished without going into overtime, and then to mix it quickly (frequently in a day or two) and have it in stores instantly. Compromises sometimes had to be made. And so, there have always been pitch issues with some of the vocals – they simply got it as good as they could get it and out it came. We went in, and, without compromising anything but the actual pitchiness of certain notes, corrected faulty pitches throughout. When I first heard the result I was astonished by how wonderful the vocals sounded. We were also able to take our time with the mix and you'll hear things in the orchestration you never heard, and even an occasional little vocal thing that was left off the original album (listen to "You'll Think of Someone"). So, it's a whole new listening experience, and one I'm especially happy to have been able to do. We also put the tracks in their correct show order for the first time.

Although it's not generally thought of in this way, *Promises, Promises* was something of a landmark show. The score today sounds as fresh and electric and vibrant as it did back in December of 1968. A couple of personal thoughts: I bought the cast album on the day it was released, and it didn't leave my record player for months. And I saw the show in late December of 1968 with its entire original cast and will never forget that performance. And yes, I was screaming and whooping with everyone else at the end of "Turkey Lurkey Time." Because I couldn't afford the very expensive \$12 matinee tickets, I used to stand in the lobby of the Shubert on matinee days just to hear that overture live. I ended up seeing the show several more times during its run and it was never less than incredible. On one memorable evening, Miss O'Hara was clearly under the weather, and in Fran's second scene a new actress appeared – she, too, was clearly under the weather, and by the time of "Knowing When To Leave" a third actress had appeared! Certainly it was the most schizophrenic Fran Kubelik ever.

Flash forward to a couple of years ago. I was asked to direct a big benefit for a charity called POZ – an evening of Burt Bacharach music at New World Stages. I agreed immediately and the first decision I made was to end act one with "Turkey Lurkey Time," recreating Michael Bennett's amazing original choreography. That number tore the roof off the theater, just as it had when I first saw the show in December of 1968. And then in the second act, we had Jill O'Hara sing "Whoever You Are," followed by "I'll Never Fall In Love Again," sung with her eventual co-star Tony Roberts. It was amazing and magical – like we'd all taken a time machine back to 1969. And yes, each number seemed as fresh and electric and vibrant as it had forty years prior.

It is the greatest of pleasures to be able to present this special edition two CD set of one of my all-time favorite shows – the wonderful Grammy award-winning original cast album, and our newly remixed version in show order.

— Bruce Kimmel