



ROMANCE OF RIDICULE

"It is demonstrable," said Pangloss, "that things cannot be otherwise than they are; for all things having been made for some end, they must necessarily be for the best end. Observe well, that the nose has been made for carrying spectacles; therefore we have spectacles. The legs are visibly designed for stockings, and therefore we have stockings. Stones have been formed to be hewn, and make castles; therefore my Lord has a very fine castle; consequently those who have merely asserted that all is good have said a very foolish thing; they should have said that all is the best possible."

Obviously Voltaire did not think much of that argument, and in *Candide* he mercilessly satirises senseless optimism. It is not until *Candide*, with his fiancée Cunegonde, and his tutor Pangloss, have been assailed by every possible misfortune in the somewhat barbaric Europe and South America of Voltaire's time that the travellers realise there is something wrong with the Panglossian theory of universal excellence. Although one of the bitterest books ever written, *Candide* is also one of the gayest, with its razor-edged story careering along at such a pace that the fantastic pile-up of catastrophes is almost as hilarious as horrifying.

Last year this romance of ridicule went the way of most good stories—to the Broadway stage as a musical. On November 24, *ZB Sunday Showcase* will present the musical numbers as recorded by the original cast, with Max Adrian as Pangloss, Barbara Cook as Cunegonde, Irre Petina as the Old Lady, and William Olvis as the Governor of Buenos Aires. *Candide* is played by the tenor Robert Rounseville, who played and sang the title role in the film, *The Tales of Hoffman*, and was in the premiere of Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress*.

The satire and the fun of the original remain in the musical version. The book was adapted by Lillian Hellman, a playwright with a notable collection of awards for her plays *The Children's Hour*, *The Little Foxes*, *Watch on the Rhine*, *Another Part of the Forest* and *The Autumn Garden*. For her first excursion into musicals she has worked with Leonard Bernstein, the conductor-composer whose works and commentaries on jazz and Beethoven have been recently heard in New Zealand. The lyrics are by Richard Wilbur, a poet whose selected works have just been published. Wilbur won the Prix de Rome three years ago and has translated Moliere for the stage. Additional lyrics are by John Latouche and Dorothy Parker, well-known for her acid wit.

With such talent behind the show, the result could not help being different from the average Broadway musical. It has been carefully labelled a "comic operetta," a category in which, Bernstein has explained, he would place musical shows which do not use the contemporary American idiom—that is, the idiom of jazz and Tin Pan Alley. While *Candide* has all the variety and verve of the modern musical, it is firmly placed as operetta, not because it is set in the 18th century, but because of the idiom of the music.

This, according to one critic, "without being strictly 18th century, maintains, with its gay pastiche of past styles and forms, a period quality. Instead of show tunes, the score goes in for something akin to Sullivan's spoofing in *The Gondoliers*, offering the wonderful paste coloratura of a 'Glitter and Be Gay,' duets and quartet finales, and schotisches and waltzes that can be danced. Along with much engaging music of this kind, there are bright and amusing lyrics."

The quality of the lyrics, and the clever way in which they have been fitted with music is apparent from the first song, the witty "Best of All Possible Worlds." In this Pangloss describes the local scene in Westphalia as perfect, the future marriage between *Candide* and Cunegonde as divinely appointed, and all for the best in this best of all possible worlds. In answer to one of his critics, he adroitly ascribes the prevalence of divorce to the natural desire to have as many marriages as possible. And then *Candide* and Cunegonde reveal, in a rapturous duet, that their ideas on their future life have nothing in common—she rhapsodises over the life of luxury ahead and he is thinking of simple rustic bliss—although they are sure they are in perfect agreement. However, before they can be disillusioned, war breaks out and Cunegonde is seemingly killed. With a sad lament *Candide* leaves, coming to Paris by way of Lisbon, with encounters with the Inquisition, earthquakes and the death of Pangloss on the way.

In Paris he finds Cunegonde sharing her favours between a Marquis and a Sultan, forced to glitter and be gay, finding that to some extent a diamond brooch can shield her from reproach. Her discovery that diamonds are a girl's best friend leads to a refrain that neatly takes off the laughing song of other operettas. In a duet with *Candide* she carefully avoids his questions on her activities, and after he has killed the Marquis and the Sultan in a duel they leave for Buenos Aires with the Old Lady, Cunegonde's duenna.

The Governor of Buenos Aires promises to marry Cunegonde, although he is sure he'll wish she were dead before they are wed, and installs the ladies in his palace. Heat and boredom lead them to make a devastating comparison of their past and present lives, while all the Governor can do is mutter "Quiet!"



VOLTAIRE

Satirist of senseless optimism

and plan how to get rid of them. He sends them off before *Candide* arrives from Eldorado, rich with gold and gems given him in that perfect country, which he describes lyrically. The Governor sells him a leaky boat, and as *Candide* appears to drown the Governor laments that he's a cad, and feels rather bad, but at least he doesn't swindle the poor—when he swindles the rich he gets so much more.

Meanwhile Cunegonde and the Old Lady are in a gaming-house in Venice, and beginning to wonder "What's the Use?" Cheating's all wrong if you have to pass it all on to the proprietor who passes it on to the police, etc. Pangloss, miraculously not dead, arrives with *Candide*, who amid great gaiety is cheated of his remaining gold. He returns sadly to Westphalia with the others. Tired of foolish optimism, *Candide* advises them to settle down to make their garden grow and try to make some sense out of life. Pangloss, of course, was never really convinced. Voltaire knew that he would go on saying that all was for the best in this best of all possible worlds.

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