THE WELLS FARGO WAGON IS A COMIN’!

In 1852, Wells, Fargo & Co. was founded to provide western America with banking and express service, meaning rapid transit of gold and other valuables. In 1858 it created the Overland Mail Company, a network of trains, stage coaches, steam ships and riders to bring goods from eastern cities to the rest of the country. People in small towns relied on ordering from catalogues (and many do today!), and goods of all varieties were delivered by the Wells Fargo Wagon, now the company’s symbol.

3 BIG QUESTIONS

1. What is the American small town yesterday and today?
2. How do status and role affect how people interact in communities?
3. How do the arts affect communities?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Books/Plays
Meredith Willson: America’s Music Man by Bill Oates
But He Doesn’t Know the Territory by Meredith Willson
100 Years on the Road: The Traveling Salesman in American Culture by Timothy B. Spears

Film/Television
The Music Man, Warner Home Video: 2011

The Simpsons: “Marge vs. The Monorail,” 1993

THE MUSIC MAN

Book, Music and Lyrics by Meredith Willson
Story by Meredith Willson & Franklin Lacey
Directed by Molly Smith
Choreography by Parker Esse
Now playing in the Fichandler
May 11 – July 22, 2012

Major support for this program is provided by the Paul M. Angell Family Foundation.

Funded in part by the D.C. Commission on the Arts & Humanities, an agency supported in part by the National Endowment for the Arts.

Helpful Hints for Theater Audiences

As an audience member at the theater, YOU are part of the show! Just as you see and hear the actors onstage, they can see and hear you in the audience. To help the performers do their best, please remember the following:

Arrive at least 30 minutes early.
Visit the restroom before the show starts.
Before the show begins, turn off your cell phone, watch alarms, pagers and other electronic devices. If anything rings by accident, shut it off immediately.
Save food and drinks for the lobby. There is no eating or drinking inside the theater.
Walk to and from your seat - no running in the theater!
Do not talk, whisper, sing or hum.
Do not use cell phones for calls, text messages, pictures or games.
Keep your feet on the floor, not on the seat in front of you.
Avoid getting up during a show because it distracts your neighbors and the performers. If you must leave, wait for a scene change, then exit quietly and quickly.
Performers appreciate enthusiastic applause rather than whistling or shouting.
Cameras and videotape are prohibited because they are distracting to the performers.
Enjoy the show!

Choreography by Parker Esse
Directed by Molly Smith
Story by Meredith Willson & Franklin Lacey
Book, Music and Lyrics by Meredith Willson

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1101 Sixth St., SW
Washington, DC 20024
Phone: 202-554-9066
Fax: 202-488-4056

Written & edited by Rebecca Campana
Research contributions from Arena Stage literary staff & volunteers
Illustration by Douglas Fraser
Music Man photos by Scott Suchman
Visit www.arenastage.org for more information on Arena Stage productions and educational opportunities.

“Ya got trouble, Right here in River City.” — Harold Hill, The Music Man

In small towns, there are tracks to live your life on and it’s shocking when anyone moves out of these predetermined tracks. Some of the most narrow-minded people come from small towns and some of the most visionary. As big cities in America are growing, many of these towns are shrinking and dis-
**ROBERT MEREDITH WILSON**

Robert Meredith Wilson was born in Mason City, Iowa in 1902. At the time of his birth, Wilson was the biggest baby ever born in Iowa, weighing in at 14 lbs. and 7 oz. Growing up in a music-loving household, Wilson started playing the flute and piccolo in high school and continued his studies at the school that would later become the Juilliard School of Music.

As a professional flutist, he toured with John Philip Sousa's band and played with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra. During World War II, Wilson became a major in the US Army.

Wilson was a music director for radio and television and a composer and lyricist for films and musicals. His songs have been sung by Frank Sinatra, Bing Crosby and Gene Autry. Among Willson's 400+ songs are works performed by the Beatles in 1962.

His Broadway musical *The Music Man* won Willson Tony and Grammy awards in 1958. Its film adaptation garnered an Academy Award for music. He went on to write the musicals *The Unsinkable Molly Brown* and *9 to 5*, among many others.

His study at the school was to bridge dialogue and song. "Everyday sounds per- motivate and even motivate Wilson's music." He challenged himself to make the shift from scene to song less abrupt. He wanted the music to flow out of the dialogue and rhythm of the scenes. In his memoir about writing the show, Wilson writes, "I had developed an abiding conviction…that in a musical, the song is the music, not the melody…The song ought to materialize out of the dialogue. I was really getting long-abandoned about the way to bridge dialogue and song."

**SOME PEOPLE COMPLAIN THAT**

"Characters in musicals go from talking one second to suddenly bursting into song.

In writing *The Music Man*, Wilson challenged himself to make the shift from scene to song less abrupt. He wanted the music to grow out of the dialogue and rhythm of the scenes. In his memoir about writing the show, Wilson writes, "I had developed an abiding conviction...that in a musical, the song is the music, not the melody...The song ought to materialize out of the dialogue. I was really getting long-abandoned about the way to bridge dialogue and song."

Willson was inspired by everyday sounds to write songs. One example is his song (recorded) by *Xanadu*. In *The Simpsons*, Sesame Street and *Family Guy*, *The Simpsons* spoofed and adapted on *The Music Man*. The song was also featured in *The Simpsons* episode "The One That Got Away." The song is easily recognizable in the opening number, "Belle," of the film *Beauty and the Beast* and *Into the Woods*. This style of music has inspired current composers. Stephen Sondheim uses rhythmic speech-singing in his musicals. For example, "Your Fault" uses rhythmic speech-singing in his musical. Willson was a music director for the New York Philharmonic Orchestra. During World War II, Wilson became a major in the US Army.

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**CONSIDER THIS**

Tricks like selling snake oil to cure illness or selling instruments then skipping town before folks realize they'll never arrive have a long history in America. They are called confidence tricks — scams in which a person is cheated after his or her trust has been won. The people, like Harold Hill, who run the scams are called "confidence men," which has since been shortened to "con men." They are known for smooth talking and their ability to convince their victims (marks) to hand over money for questionable goods or services. Those who were caught were often run out of town or tarred and feathered.

**MAKING A SMALL TOWN**

River City, Iowa is inspired by Meredith Willson's hometown of Mason City, Iowa. In Arena Stage's production of *The Music Man*, it could be any small town in America.

Willson's characters are familiar archetypes: the blustering mayor, the gossiping women, the outsiders, and the prominent businessmen. Costume designer Judith Bowden helps us readily recognize these characters through their clothing. A school gymnasium or town multi-purpose building is often the town meeting place. Set designer Eugene Lee has designed a floor for the Fichandler (Arena Stage’s theater-in-the-round) resembling the floor in these buildings. Flags and other hints of Americana create the effect of a patriotic small town during the Fourth of July celebration.

**ACTIVITY:** If you could only make one simple set to embody multiple locations in your town or city, what would it look like? Render (draw) how you would represent it on stage, paying attention to color, aesthetics and detail. Remember: actors will need space to perform.