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THE PLAY

Extra! Extra! Read all about it!

It's 1899 and New Yorkers are hungry for newspapers with flashy photos and exciting headlines. Scrappy kids, known as "newsies," sell the papers using confidence, charm and – sometimes – tricks.

It's **Les** and **Davey's** first day selling papers, and long-time newsie **Jack Kelly** immediately decides to show them the ropes.

However, now that the Spanish-American War is over, demand for newspapers has dropped. Powerful newspaper owners, like **Joseph Pulitzer**, decide to increase the price the newsies pay for the papers, making money by cutting into the kids' profits. Jack rallies other newsies from across the city to form a union to fight back. They organize a strike, refusing to sell any newspapers until the price goes back down.

With the help of **Katherine Plumber**, a talented journalist, the newsies' movement gets the attention of the city and the nation. All the while, Jack dreams of a life far from the city's streets.

Based on a true story, the newsies risk their safety, livelihood and freedom to fight for a better life and demand respect.



TONY AWARD-WINNING MUSICAL

DISNEY'S NEWSIES

MUSIC BY **ALAN MENKEN** | LYRICS BY **JACK FELDMAN** | BOOK BY **HARVEY FIERSTEIN**
A MUSICAL BASED ON THE DISNEY FILM WRITTEN BY **BOB TZUDIKER** AND **NONI WHITE**
ORIGINALLY PRODUCED ON BROADWAY BY **DISNEY THEATRICAL PRODUCTIONS**
DIRECTED BY **MOLLY SMITH** | CHOREOGRAPHED BY **PARKER ESSE**
MUSIC DIRECTION BY **LAURA BERGQUIST**
FICHANDLER STAGE | **NOVEMBER 1 - DECEMBER 22, 2019**

"Courage cannot erase our fear. Courage is when we face our fear."

— Davey, *Newsies*

Newsies is generously sponsored by **George Ftikas** in memory of **Duffy Ftikas**,  **The Reef Team** 
The Drutz Family Fund for Musical Theater, **GEICO**, **Ilene and Steven Rosenthal** and **Sheila Stampfli**.

Choreography is sponsored by **Virginia McGehee Friend**.

The D.C. Ticket Partnership is generously sponsored by the **Paul M. Angell Family Foundation**. Additional support is provided by the **DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities**, **The Bay & Paul Foundations**, **Collins Aerospace**, **the Albert and Lillian Small Foundation**, **AT&T** and **Exelon**.

MEET THE COMPOSER



ALAN MENKEN

“A song is a conversation ... between you and the listener.”

You may not know his name, but you’ve known Alan Menken’s music for years. In addition to writing the music for *Newsies*, Menken wrote the music for several Disney classics including *The Little Mermaid*, *Aladdin*, *Beauty and the Beast* and *Tangled*.

Menken was born in New York City to an actress and piano player/dentist. He took piano and violin lessons and, at an early age, began to write his own orchestrations. Menken grew up surrounded by the arts, but he never thought that he would pursue an artistic career. However, although he started college as a pre-med major, Menken couldn’t stay away from the arts and graduated with a degree in music.

His first project as a professional composer was a rock-ballet for a dance company called “Children of the World.” Soon Menken gained the attention of prominent movie and theater makers, including Walt Disney Studios, where he has been since 1988. Menken has earned numerous awards including 11 Grammy Awards and a Tony Award.

FROM THE DIRECTOR’S NOTEBOOK

MOLLY SMITH

“Children are taking over the world – and that’s a good thing! Between gun control and climate change, the world is looking at two young people’s crusades right now, as the younger generation stands up and starts fighting for all of our survival. *Newsies* is the same story, over 100 years ago...It’s a gold standard musical for our time.”



Molly Smith

YAP LIKE A NEWSIE

These words were used as slang terms between newsies. What slang words could they be replaced with today?

GRIPIN’ To worry or stress

SCAB A traitor to the strike

PAPE A newspaper

HAWK To sell

SCARED THE BEJEEBERS To shock/frighten

RAGAMUFFIN A messy or dirty person

SOURPUSS A grouchy person



African American newsboy. Photograph. Retrieved from the Library of Congress

THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION AND UNIONS

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, the Industrial Revolution began and the culture of the United States changed rapidly.

Before this era, many Americans worked in agriculture and craftsmanship but, as the U.S. became a mass exporter of goods and resources, Americans started leaving the farm for the factory. Between 1870 and 1920, 11 million Americans migrated from rural parts of the country to cities. Pay was low and conditions were dangerous, but factory work was plentiful and appealing, especially for the large population of immigrants coming to the country for a new beginning.

Men, women and children as young as 10 years old found work in factories. There were no laws regulating child labor and by 1900 upwards of two million children worked in factories around the country. Hiring children who could work longer for less and fit into places adults couldn’t was profitable for factory owners.



Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, National Child Labor Committee Collection

The horrific working conditions, such as dangerous machinery, excessive heat and toxic fumes, led workers to organize labor unions and strikes. A labor union is an organization of workers in a specific occupation that band together to protect workers and improve their working conditions. From steel workers in factories to Pullman porters on railroads, workers across the country demanded better pay and safer conditions.

If a union went on strike (refusing to work until conditions are met), a factory would not be able to function. The newsies strike of 1899 is considered by many to be the first successful union strike led by young people in American history.



Newsboys buying brass checks in a newspaper office. These checks cost one-half the selling price of the newspaper and were exchanged at another window for the number of papers they call for. (Library of Congress)

A DAY IN THE LIFE

The newspaper business was thriving and open to any and all who wanted to participate. No matter your race or gender, anyone could be a newsie.

Newsies focuses primarily on those children who sold papers for survival and did not attend school. In 1899, more than 60% of children in New York City had an immigrant parent and thousands were homeless. Immigrants faced housing and job discrimination because of their nationality. For those immigrant children who were newsies, the money they earned was often used to support themselves and their families.

Some newsies came from stable homes and sold newspapers to make extra spending money for themselves. They would sell papers before school and then during the evening rush hour before going home to their families.

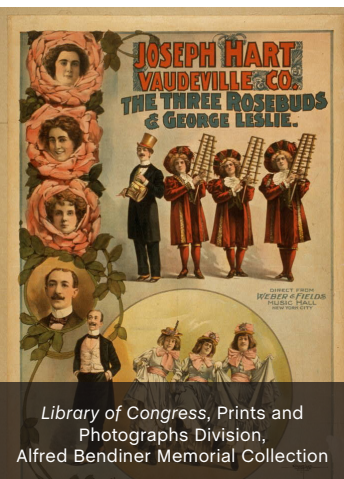
It wasn't uncommon for police to arrest kids who were out late selling papers or caught sleeping in alleyways or burlesque clubs. The police would bring them to the station until they could contact their parents and have them returned home.



READ

"Kids on Strike!" by Susan Campbell Bartoletti (Chapter 2)

"Children of the City" by David Nasaw (Chapter 5)



WATCH

Medda Larkin is the owner of a theater that produces vaudeville shows, a popular form of early musical theater. Learn more about these comedic and fun variety shows:

<https://youtu.be/-BL5Pk0dZe4>

REAL PEOPLE. REAL STORIES.

KID BLINK AND MORRIS COHEN

INSPIRATION FOR JACK KELLY

Born Louis Ballatt, newsies' union leader Kid Blink was blind in one eye and named for his signature eye patch. For entertainment, writers often quoted Blink using the phonetic spelling of his speeches (e.g., "Dat's de feller wot made de fight yistiddy."). He and the other newsies found this condescending.

Morris Cohen, another newsies' union leader, sold about 300 copies of the *World* per day in City Hall Park. He was one of the original organizers of the strike and was on the initial executive committee of the newsies' union. He also helped lead the rally at New Irving Hall. Cohen was elected the union president.



NELLIE BLY

INSPIRATION FOR KATHERINE PLUMBER

Journalist Elizabeth Jane Cochrane wrote under the name "Nellie Bly." As a trailblazer of investigative journalism, she reported on her record-breaking trip around the world in less than 80 days and even faked a mental illness to report on the experience of a patient in a mental institution.



JOSEPH PULITZER

Joseph Pulitzer was born in Hungary. After working as a fireman, dockworker, waiter and gravedigger, he was offered a job writing for the *Westliche Post*, a German newspaper. Pulitzer purchased the *New York World* in 1883 and turned the failing paper into one of the most widely read publications in the city. The Pulitzer Prize, an award for excellence in journalism, literature and music, is named in his honor.



AIDA OVERTON WALKER

INSPIRATION FOR MEDDA LARKIN

Aida Overton Walker was one of the premier African-American artists at the turn of the 20th century, known for her original dance routines and refusal to conform to the stereotype of traditional black female performers. Overton had a successful career as a star. Walker worked hard to aid other young black women in the arts.

These biographies excerpted from *Disney's Newsies Production Handbook*.

EXPLORE MORE

According to the Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness, between 1890 and 1920 the population of New York City increased 124%. Discover how the influx of millions of people from all over the world shifted the culture of New York and led to widespread homelessness and poverty:

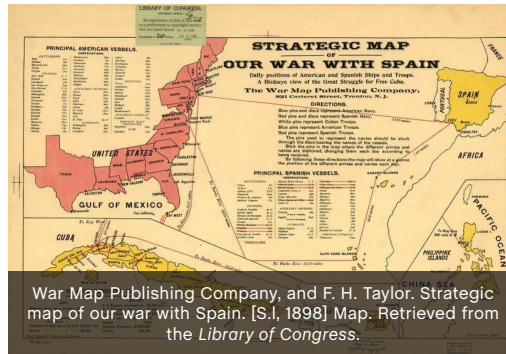
nychomelesshistory.org

WAR AT SEA AND YELLOW JOURNALISM

The headlines of the Spanish-American War sold a lot of papers. In 1895, Cuba sought independence from Spain.

Early in 1898, the U.S. declared that Cuba had a right to independence. On April 24, 1898, Spain declared war on the U.S. for interfering. The war was fought in Cuba and the Philippines, which were also under Spanish rule. Spain surrendered on July 17, 1898. About 3,000 Americans died in the war, mostly of disease.

Although it was brief, Americans were captivated by the war. Newspapers exaggerated headlines in a practice which would become known as “yellow journalism.” Yellow journalism emphasized the sensational (and selling papers!) over facts. This resulted in the first media war. Newspaper companies, like the *New York World* and the *New York Journal*, battled to sell the most newspapers with the most eye-catching headlines. After the war ended, newspaper owners faced lower sales, leading to the events that inspired *Newsies*.



War Map Publishing Company, and F. H. Taylor. Strategic map of our war with Spain. [S.I., 1898] Map. Retrieved from the Library of Congress.

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 15 minutes early.
- Visit the restroom before the show starts.
- Sit in the exact seat on your ticket. Ask the usher for help finding it.
- Before the show begins, turn off your phone, watch alarms and any other electronic devices. If anything rings by accident, turn it off immediately.
- Do not use your phone for texts, calls, games or pictures.
- You cannot take pictures or make recordings in the theater, even before or after the play.
- There is no food allowed in the theater.
- Do not talk, whisper, sing or hum, unless invited by the performers to do so.
- Keep your feet on the floor and off the seat in front of you.
- Avoid getting up during a show. If you must leave, wait for a scene change and exit quietly and quickly.
- Respond to the show; you can laugh, cry and gasp. However, don't repeat lines out loud or talk to the performers on stage.
- Be sure to applaud at the end!

RESOURCES

TO READ

- Kids on Strike!*
by Susan Campbell Bartoletti (Chapter 2)
- Children of the City*
by David Nasaw (Chapter 5)

ON THE WEB

- “Labor Day: Children at Work” — *U.S. National Archives*
<https://prologue.blogs.archives.gov/2018/09/03/labor-day-children-at-work/>
- National Child Labor Commission Collection — *Library of Congress*
<https://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/nclc>
- Alan Menken Biography
<http://www.alanmenken.com/m/biography/>
- “Industrial Revolution America” — *By Rebecca Brooks*
<https://historyofmassachusetts.org/industrial-revolution-america/>
- What Were the Work Conditions in American Factories in 1900?
<https://classroom.synonym.com/were-work-conditions-american-factories-1900-23383.html>



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Visit www.arenastage.org for more information on Arena Stage productions and educational opportunities.



COST COMPARISON

In the early 1900s, a newspaper cost a reader \$.05. Here are the costs of a few other common items:

- 1 dozen eggs: \$.22
- 1 quart of milk: \$.06
- 1 loaf of bread: \$.05
- A front-row theater ticket: \$1.50

DANCE SPEAKS

PARKER ESSE

“My job as a choreographer is to find choreography to reflect not only the fellowship between the newsies, but it’s important to demonstrate an inner struggle and desire to create change. I know you have heard of the phrase “dance like no one is watching”... I think we are going to do the exact opposite. I think the newsies want to be seen. They have such a struggle inside that the only way they can express themselves is physically, by dancing and proving themselves through movement. I want the show to be a living, moving organism.”



Sixteen-year-old cast member Emre Ocak does a C-Jump.

THREE BIG QUESTIONS

1

When is it the right time to be a leader?

2

How does music and dance help us understand a story?

3

What does it mean to be a part of a community?