



## FROM THE DIRECTOR'S NOTEBOOK

“ 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-

appearing. I am deeply interested in small towns. They dot the American landscape, and they are at the heart of American mythology.

In *The Music Man*, Willson has captured the essence of a small town in the middle of America. ”

**Molly Smith,**  
Arena Stage artistic director

## 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.



The Wells Fargo wagon

## 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  
*Meredith Willson's The Music Man*, Walt Disney Home Entertainment: 2003.  
*The Simpsons*: "Marge vs. The Monorail," 1993

### On the Web

The Music Man Square: [themusicmansquare.org](http://themusicmansquare.org)

## 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!**



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Arena Stage productions  
and educational opportunities.



# ARENA'S PAGE

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### THE PLAY

Welcome to River City, Iowa – that is unless you are an outsider.

Con artist "Professor" Harold Hill arrives by train, bringing lots of smooth talk and trouble with him. Posing as a traveling salesman, he's swindled entire towns throughout the mid-West, and River City is his latest target. He gets the town's cold shoulder until he convinces them that their town is on the road to the depths of degradation. The only way to save it and its children's souls is to start a boys' band. The townspeople fork over their money to Hill and wait with excitement for the expensive instruments to arrive.

The whole town is hoodwinked by Hill...except for Marion Paroo, the town's librarian and music teacher. When Marion tries to expose Hill as a conman, he decides to woo her and save his hide.

Music is changing River City. Will Hill's ways and Marion's heart change too or will Hill skip town before the jig is up?

"Ya got trouble, Right here in River City."  
– Harold Hill, *The Music Man*



## 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.

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## MEET THE PLAYWRIGHT



**R**obert Meredith Willson was born in Mason City, Iowa in 1902. At the time of his birth Willson was the biggest baby ever born in Iowa, weighing in at 14 lbs. and 7 oz. Growing up in a music-loving household, Willson 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 Phillip Sousa's band and played with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra. During World War II Willson became a major in the US Army.

Willson 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 is "It's Beginning to Look A Lot Like Christmas."

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 *Here's Love*.

He was appointed to the National Council on Arts and Humanities by President Lyndon B. Johnson and awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Ronald Reagan. Outside his work in the arts, Willson was a member of Big Brothers (now Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America).

Willson died in 1984. ●

## MUSIC STYLE

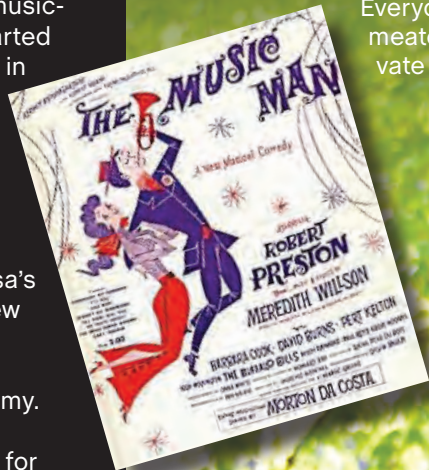
**S**ome people complain that characters in musicals go from talking one second to suddenly bursting into song.

In writing *The Music Man*, Willson challenged himself to make the shift from scene to song less abrupt. He wanted the music grow out of the dialogue and rhythm of the scenes. In his memoir about writing the show, Willson writes "I had developed an abiding conviction...that in a musical comedy the song ought to materialize out of the dialogue. I was really getting Iowa-stubborn about...the way...to bridge dialogue and song."

The sounds and rhythm of a train are created by a train car of traveling salesmen in the song "Rock Island." Piano student Amaryllis' piano exercises lead into and accompany "Good Night, My Someone." Willson also uses speech like an instrument. Harold Hill, fast-talking salesman that he is, often chants or speaks more than he sings in songs like "Trouble."

This style of music has inspired current composers. Stephen Sondheim uses rhythmic speech-singing in his musicals – for example, "Your Fault" in *Into the Woods*. This style is also seen in the opening number, "Belle," of *Beauty and the Beast*, in which the music uses the rhythms and speech of everyday life. ●

Everyday sounds permeate and even motivate Willson's music.



It took Willson 6 years and over 40 drafts to write *The Music Man*.

*The Music Man* is so popular that it has been spoofed and adapted on many shows, including *The Simpsons*, *Sesame Street* and *Family Guy*.

One of its songs, "Till There Was You," was covered (recorded) by The Beatles in 1962.

**a!** **Activity:** Choose an everyday moment, like taking Metro to school, and compose a song inspired by the rhythms, conversation and sounds of that moment.

## CONsider THIS.



### "Arrest of the Confidence Man."

For the last few months a man has been traveling about the city, known as the "Confidence Man;" that is, he would go up to a perfect stranger in the street and, being a man of genteel appearance, would easily command an interview. Upon this interview he would say after some little conversation, "Have you confidence in me to trust me with your watch until tomorrow;" the stranger at this novel request, supposing him to be some old acquaintance not at that moment recollected, allows him to take the watch, thus placing 'confidence; in the honesty of the stranger, who walks of laughing and the other supposing it to be a joke allows him so to do. In this way many have been duped..."

This 1849 article from the "Police Intelligence" section of the *New York Herald* describes the arrest of William Thompson, whose crimes caused the term "confidence man" to be created.

**T**ricks 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. ●

Traveling salesmen made their living by seeking buyers in assigned areas called "territories." They sold their goods to businesses or public institutions rather than individuals. They rarely had inventory with them, instead carrying samples so buyers could place orders. Con men like Harold Hill gave travelling salesmen a bad name and made an already competitive and difficult job even harder.

## MAKING A SMALL TOWN



**R**iver 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. ●

**archetype** – a recurring type of character, setting or story that is easily recognizable

**a!** **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.