

THE LIBERTY BELLES

A WWII Comedy with Music

Written by
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THE LIBERTY BELLES

THE CHARACTERS

Aunt Bebe Bennet LeGrand, 65, a vaudeville star

Al (or Alice Betty) Pfeiffer, 57, her former accompanist

Wilhelmina (“Billie”) Murphy, 45, her niece

Roberta (“Bobbie”) Alworthy, 43, Billie’s sister

Bertha Mae Pope, 45, Bobbie’s longtime maid

Elizabeth (“Betsy”) Belvedere, 21, a secret heiress bellhop

Buddy Evans, 62, a famous Broadway producer

Barbie Greco, 25, an aspiring actress

THE SETTING

THE BLUE SKY CLUB

The famous, now closed, rooftop club.

The Grand Belvedere Hotel

New York City

December 18, 1944

AUTHOR'S NOTE

THE LIBERTY BELLES premiered June 7, 2014, presented by The Austin Producers' Club at the historic Austin, Texas, Scottish Rite Theatre, which is the oldest, continually operating theatre west of the Mississippi. Audiences loved the show and it was realized, subsequently, that this nostalgic, madcap comedy ~ designed as a comedy narrative with "musical windows" to provide the opportunity for a producer / production company to showcase seven women* and one man** singing classic songs ~ could be redesigned drawing from the public domain American Musical Canon. This 2022 version completes that vision! (Note: accompanying youtube.com video links are for your reference).

In addition to Big Band hits, here is an abundance of famous songs made hits from the time of America's vaudeville performers to the present day. The kind of music that *The HoneyBees* turned *The Liberty Belles* would have sung during their years together, can now be widely appreciated by contemporary audiences.

THE LIBERTY BELLES offered audiences, as renowned Austin, Texas theatre critic Michael Meigs hailed, "the feeling that we're sitting in the balcony at The Rialto for Saturday afternoon's main feature." A feeling to be shared!

* *The roles of 'Alice' and 'Buddy' provide opportunities for switchable gender casting. "Alice" is the accompanist who occasionally chimes in with dialogue ("Alice" may also become "Al" and the "Buddy" modified to be played by a female peer to "Bebe").*

** *Companies whose memberships contain young male leading performers may also be interested in reading **The Liberty Belles Chime**, the companion script featuring a second story line opportunity for young romance by introducing the young producer-in-the-making, "Benny," as a love interest for "Barbie."*

THE LIBERTY BELLES

Featured Songs from *The American Songbook*

Facinating Rhythm
I Love A Piano
Someone To Watch Over Me
I'll Build A Stairway To Paradise
Don't Mind The Rain
Don't Blame It All On Broadway
Blue Skies
Ah! Sweet Mysteries Of Life!
Give My Regards To Broadway
For Me And My Gal
Keep The Home Fires Burning
Look For The Silver Lining
Somebody Loves Me
Say It With Music
How Ya Gonna Keep 'Em Down On The Farm
Won't You Come Home, Bill Bailey?
You Made Me Love You
Everybody Loves My Baby
(I'll Have) Manhattan
Remember
All Alone
My Man
Who
Bye, Bye Blackbird
California, Here I Come
Some Of These Days
Always
'Deed I Do
The Man I Love
I'm Sitting On Top Of The World
I Can't Believe You're In Love With Me
Who's Sorry Now
What'll I Do?
Oh, Do It Again
There's A Little Spark Of Love
After You Get What You Want, You Don't Want It
If You Don't Want My Peaches, You Better Stop Shaking My Tree
America The Beautiful
Anchors Aweigh
You're A Grand Old Flag
God Bless America

PROLOGUE

(The lights begin to fade as the piano music in the distance is heard. It is Gershwin's *Fascinating Rhythm*.)

Lights come up on a New York City street. The busy hubbub of Manhattan introduces our players, who pass each other on the sidewalk, stepping off the curb amidst the sounds of zooming traffic. BEBE LE GRAND steps into the light.)

BEBE (conjuring, she slowly sings)
Fascinating Rhythm – You've got me on the go!

(Enter the conservative-looking BILLIE MURPHY, USR; she holds a letter in her gloved hand. She's distressed as she looks to Heaven for help.)

BILLIE
Oh, Jack, please make Aunt Bebe all right.

BEBE (sings)
Fascinating Rhythm – I'm all a-quiver!

(Enter the glamorous BOBBIE ALWORTHY and her salt-of-the-earth maid, BERTHA MAE POPE, USL. Bobbie is dressed to the nines, a fur coat dripping off her shoulders. Stylish Bertha waves a letter like a beacon.)

BOBBIE
Haven't heard from her in years and now, an emergency!

BILLIE
Jack, I don't think I could endure another loss – *(to herself)* C'mon, Billie: be strong!

BEBE (sings)
*What a mess you're making!
The neighbors want to know
Why I'm always shaking
Just like a flivver!*

BOBBIE (anxious)
Bertha, how do I look?

BERTHA
Be-yute-i-ful! Love that mothball perfume.

BOBBIE

I used our last \$3.00 to rent these pelts out of hock.

BERTHA

We won't starve, Bobbie-girl. We can get at least \$1.00 for the rubber in that girdle!

BEBE, BILLIE, BOBBIE, BERTHA (sing)

Each morning I get up with the sun

Start a-hopping

Never stopping

To find at night no work has been done!

(Enter BETSY BELVEDERE, SR, half-dressed in her hotel bellhop uniform. As she crosses downstage, she fumbles with her hat in an attempt to shove her long locks under the cap.)

BETSY (anxiously to herself)

This is a hair-brained scheme, Betsy! You should've stayed in housekeeping. My secret plan has to work – it'll mean a 40 cent raise *or* surely get me fired. (*Bucking herself up.*) Be bold, Betsy. The times demand it!

(Enter BUDDY EVANS, SL. Buddy hurriedly reads a letter as he juggles his stuffed valise; *Racing Forms* and music charts teem from it.)

BUDDY

I told that kid I don't need his advice for the act! (*Reading.*) "Mr. Evans, please give me a shot. I got an ear for the new sound!" Sound schmound! (*He crumples up the letter.*) That Lenny Bernstein should stay in the family business and keep on selling beauty supplies!

(Enter BARBIE GRECO, SR. She removes an apron as she looks out across the water.)

BARBIE

I gaze across the Long Island Sound and look at that glimmering city, so close like I could hold it in my hand, and I think of you, Ma. God rest your soul, you always told me, "Life's a balancing act," and it's true. I know it's my turn on the wire, Ma, but you gotta send me a sign. Just something, Ma, to give me hope, something to help me sing out, "Barbie, you don't need a net anymore!"

ALL (sing)

*I know that once it didn't matter
But now you're doing wrong
When you start to patter
I'm so unhappy
Why won't you take a day off?
Decide to run along
Somewhere far away off
And make it snappy!*

*Oh, how I long to be
The one I used to be!
Fascinating rhythm
Oh, won't you stop ticking on me?
Fascinating Rhythm!
Please stop picking on me!*

BLACKOUT

ACT ONE

Scene 1

(The rooftop lounge of The Blue Sky Club of the elegant Belvedere Hotel. Morning light seeps in between the sloppily closed, ancient, but grand draperies of the tired room. The club apparently has been shuttered for some time. Dust cloths cover the few cabaret tables and chairs that are scattered about. The once beautiful bar is littered with cartons; it's a half-packed scene that indicates little respect for the glamorous world it formally was. A lonely piano faces upstage, its ivories reflected against a dingy mirrored wall behind the hanging rows of dusty martini glasses.)

(BEBE enters and nostalgically takes it all in with a large, anticipatory breath. Her eyes sparkle. She claps her hands, barely containing her excitement.)

BEBE

What memories! Oh, to be young again. Let's make it snappy, kid!

(BETSY – in bellhop's uniform and cap – lugs and enormous trunk through the archway. She is exhausted and pants, heavily. Petite Betsy pushes against it, barely moving it an inch with each exasperated shove.)

BETSY

Miss LeGrand, I'm moving this trunk if it kills me!

BEBE

Nobody's dying today, uh – ?. (*looks to Betsy*)

BETSY (flummoxed)

Fred! – Er, Bruce! That's right, Bruce!

BEBE

Well, Bruce, I'm counting on you to help me with my plan.
Oh, would you look at this place?!

(Bebe goes to the windows, carefully pulling back the long curtains. Betsy continues pushing the big, heavy trunk into the center of the lounge room.)

BETSY (whispers to herself; eyes rolling)

Bruce? Brilliant, Betsy.

(Bebe lifts the dust covers off the cluster of tables.)

BEBE

What's that, Bruce?

BETSY

Uh, *let's see*, where do you want this?

BEBE

Over there – we've got to set the stage?

BETSY

For actors?

BEBE

You might say that – or "*Lunatic Lifers*" ... one never really ever leaves showbiz.

(Betsy shoves the trunk, hard, and slips on the dance floor, squealing in surprise. She catches herself, dropping her vocal register. A PERSON IN PAJAMAS appears from the behind the bar. It's pianist, ALICE (or AL) PFEIFFER. Betsy squeals again then quickly covers her mouth. Hopeless.)

BETSY

Oh! (*Shifting into baritone.*) You scared me!

AL

Likewise. You ain't so hot looking yerself.

BETSY

I beg your pardon. I meant to say, "Good Morning."

AL

If you say so, Mack.

BEBE

Alice! How've you been?

AL

Oh, Miss LeGrand!

BEBE

Ain't seen you since we played The Palace!

(They happily face-off, make a fist, and pull down with their right arms raised high; like a conductor pulling the train whistle... obviously, one of their favorite ancient rituals.)

BEBE & AL

WHOO-WHOO!

(Alice quickly sits at the piano for a little Ragtime accompaniment.)

BEBE

Just like the good old days!

SONG: "I LOVE A PIANO" (Berlin)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wNOiT0dD_RI (1:00)

BEBE (sings)

I love a piano!

I love a piano!

I love to hear the music play!

BEBE & AL & BETSY (*as Bruce*)

Upon a piano,

A grand piano,

It simply carries me away!

I know a fine way to treat a Steinway –

I love to run my fingers o'er the key, the ivories --