



The DROWSY Chaperone

2022
SEASON

MUSICAL

PRODUCTION NUMBER 240

Jun. 17 —THROUGH— Aug. 06

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◇ INTERESTING FACTS ◇

"Mix-ups, mayhem and a gay wedding!"

Debuting nearly a year after American Musical Theatre was reinvented by Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein II with *Show Boat*, Julie Gable and Sidney Stein's *The Drowsy Chaperone* joined other 1928 musicals such as *Whoopee!*, *Three Cheers*, *Hold Everything!*, and *Chee-Chee* in continuing the older style of musical comedies. Whereas *Show Boat* set a new path for Broadway with serious themes and musical numbers that grew out of character and plot, shows like *The Drowsy Chaperone* showed their Vaudeville roots by focusing on performers and numbers tied together with the flimsiest of plots.

In fact, *The Drowsy Chaperone* makes this earlier form of musical comedies part of its story, focusing on Janet Van De Graaf's starring role in *Feldzieg's Follies*, an obvious reference to the famous Ziegfeld Follies. While today we might remember the *Ziegfeld Follies* from the series of films that bear the name, the actual Follies were a revue featuring beautiful chorus girls, elaborate sets, and top entertainers like Fannie Brice, Bob Hope, Will Rogers, Gypsy Rose Lee, Josephine Baker, and W. C. Fields. Inspired by the Folies Bergère of Paris, Florenz Ziegfeld Jr. produced these extravaganzas on Broadway from 1907 to 1931, with revivals in 1934 and 1936.



The 1918 Ziegfeld Follies featured Jane "The Oops Girl" Roberts, center, with from left, W. C. Fields, Will Rogers, Eddie Cantor, and Harry Keely.

Not only is *The Drowsy Chaperone*'s Victor Feldzieg an obvious stand in for Ziegfeld, but many of the cast were Vaudeville performers themselves, including acts such as "The Tall Brothers", Noel Fitzpatrick, "Ukulele Lil", Beatrice Stockwell, and Jane "The Oops Girl" Roberts whose early career was launched by her appearance as a Ziegfeld Girl in the 1918 Follies. Roberts rose to fame replacing another dancer who took sick during the 1918 Spanish flu pandemic when New York Health Commissioner Royal S. Copeland insisted theatres remain open against the advice of the Surgeon General and the example of most other large American cities.

Opening at the Morosco after the premature closure of the play *Gang War*, *The Drowsy Chaperone* was hailed as a "happy exercise in escapism" and "a festive entrée" by The New York Times, and "a refreshing cocktail of a show" by Variety. The Morosco itself was still new at the time, having opened in 1917. It would survive until 1982, when it

was demolished along with the Helen Hayes, Bijou, Astor, and Gaiety theaters to build the Times Square Marriott Marquis Hotel which houses the 1,611 seat Marquis Theatre.

While most of Gable and Stein's theatrical output is lost to time (outside the execrable *The Enchanted Nightingale*), the songwriting duo continued to create music well into the 1950s as part of Sid Caesar's *Your Show of Shows* which provided employment for many aging Vaudeville and Broadway creators.

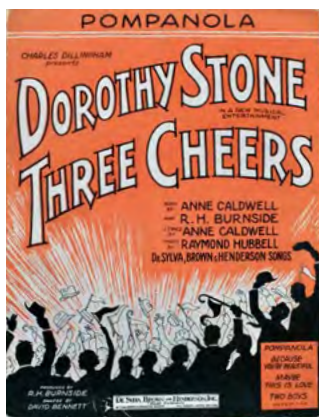
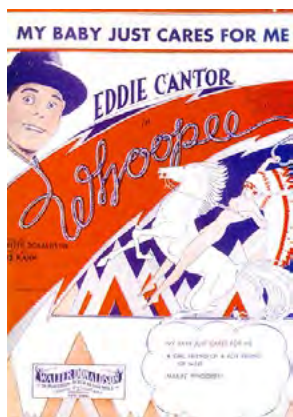
Neither Gable nor Stein married, and both retired to The Actors Fund Home during the period it was located on the Hetty Green estate in Englewood, New Jersey. Both lived long lives and passed away of natural causes on May 1, 2006. Gable was 101 years old and Stein 103, but thanks to the recent remaster of *The Drowsy Chaperone* they will always "stumble along" to new generations of fans.

—HCTO Guest Dramaturg Mark Fossen, MFA



The stage of the Morosco Theatre, site of the November 1928 premiere of The Drowsy Chaperone.

◇ INTERESTING (TRUE) FACTS ◇

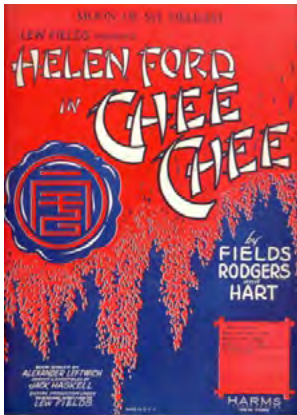


Some of what you have read in this Interesting Facts is (hopefully) interesting *fiction*. *The Drowsy Chaperone* didn't exist, the team of Gable and Stein is an invention, and the stars associated with the 1928 recording are all fictional.

In fact, *The Drowsy Chaperone* started life in 1997 as a wedding gift for Canadian actor/writer Bob Martin and actress Janet van de Graaf. Performer friends including Don McKellar, Lisa Lambert, and Greg Morrison got together to create a musical spoof with styles ranging from the 1920s to the 40s as a gift to the couple and performed at the couple's stag party. There was no Man in Chair in this first version, but when the group decided to take the show to the Toronto Fringe Festival, Martin joined as a writer and created the role of Man in Chair as a framing device.

Following its fringe success, the show saw two further Toronto productions including a 2001 run at the 1,000-seat Winter Garden Theatre. It was during that run that New York producer Roy Miller saw it and secured the rights. It took a few years of readings, out-of-town tryouts, and revisions before *The Drowsy Chaperone* opened on May 1, 2006. This one-time wedding gift was nominated for thirteen Tony Awards, winning five of them, including Best Book of a Musical and Best Original Score.

While our story of the 1928 *Drowsy Chaperone* is fiction, much of the surrounding history is fact. Here are links to find out more about the real Broadway history surrounding this fictional Broadway show.



The other 1928 musical comedies mentioned actually existed:

- ♦ [Whoopee!](#)
- ♦ [Three Cheers](#)
- ♦ [Hold Everything!](#)
- ♦ [Chee-Chee](#)
- ♦ [Gang War](#)

For more on the fascinating history of the Ziegfeld Follies, check out:

- ♦ <https://allthatsinteresting.com/ziegfeld-follies>
- ♦ <https://www.musicals101.com/ziegfeld-follies.htm>
- ♦ <https://americanmusical.wordpress.com/the-ziegfeld-follies/>

The photo of the 1918 Follies is real, though the woman captioned as Jane “The Oops Girl” Roberts is actually actress Lillian Lorraine.

Was the New York Theatre really open during The Spanish flu pandemic of 1918? [Find out more about Broadway’s response to the 1918 pandemic.](#)

The review quotes mentioned are exact, but come from reviews of *The Drowsy Chaperone*’s 2006 Broadway premiere instead of its fictional 1928 one.

The history of the Morosco Theatre is factual. In reality, *The Drowsy Chaperone* premiered at the Marquis Theatre in 2006 on the site where the Morosco once stood.

While Gable and Stein obviously never retired there, the [Actors Fund Home](#) is a retirement community for entertainers founded in 1902 and active to this day.

—HCTO Guest Dramaturg Mark Fossen, MFA