

Book by DOUGLAS CARTER BEANE
Music & Lyrics by DOUGLAS J. COHEN

THE BIG TIME



A NEW MUSICAL COMEDY

STUDIO CAST RECORDING



TRACKS

- One* **OVERTURE** The Band
- Two* **MEDLEY OF OTHER PEOPLE'S HITS** Raymond Bokhour, Santino Fontana & Debbie Gravitte
- Three* **A SONG OF PEACE** Santino Fontana & Debbie Gravitte
- Four* **I COULD GET USED TO THAT** Debbie Gravitte, Santino Fontana & Michael McCormick
- Five* **ALL ABOARD** Santino Fontana, Debbie Gravitte, Diane Phelan, Will Swenson, Michael McCormick, Bradley Dean & Company
- Six* **I'VE GOT MY EYE ON YOU** Will Swenson
- Seven* **WESTERN WAYS** Michael McCormick, Raymond Bokhour, Will Swenson & Jackie Hoffman
- Eight* **IF I WAS YOU** Debbie Gravitte, Santino Fontana & Will Swenson
- Nine* **EYE TO EYE** Michael McCormick, Debbie Gravitte & Santino Fontana
- Ten* **WE ARE GONNA SAVE THE WORLD** Debbie Gravitte, Santino Fontana, Bradley Dean, Diane Phelan & Company
- Eleven* **HOW WE GONNA SAVE THE WORLD?** Diane Phelan, Debbie Gravitte, Bradley Dean & Santino Fontana
- Twelve* **A GUY WITHOUT A GIRL** Santino Fontana, Debbie Gravitte, Bradley Dean, Diane Phelan & Will Swenson
- Thirteen* **GRUSHA'S RANT** Jackie Hoffman
- Fourteen* **A LITTLE SOFT SHOE** Diane Phelan, Will Swenson, Raymond Bokhour & Jackie Hoffman
- Fifteen* **THE BORDER SONG** Jackie Hoffman & The Band
- Sixteen* **BORN TO BE IN THE BIZ** Bradley Dean & Company
- Seventeen* **WHO IS THIS GUY?** Debbie Gravitte
- Eighteen* **THANK YOU FOR TODAY** Diane Phelan
- Nineteen* **THE BIG TIME** Debbie Gravitte, Santino Fontana, Jackie Hoffman & Company
- Twenty* **EXIT MUSIC** The Band

THE CAST

In order of appearance

SANTINO FONTANA

as Tony Stevenitti

DEBBIE GRAVITTE

as Donna Stevenitti

DIANE PHELAN

*as Undersecretary Penelope
Briggs-Hopkins*

WILL SWENSON

as Pavlov Pushkart

MICHAEL McCORMICK

*as Leader Residu
and Morty*

BRADLEY DEAN

as CIA Agent "Big Apple"

RAYMOND BOKHOUR

*as Mimke
and Announcer of the 500 Club*

JACKIE HOFFMAN

as Grusha

DIG. THE YEAR IS 1962.

The Jazz is hot, the humor is warm, and the war is cold. Welcome to *The Big Time*. The entrance to our show is August Eriksmoen's swinging OVERTURE – a written contract that we are about to have ourselves a musical comedy. Climb aboard for a very daffy but ultimately touching cruise.

Our story begins in Atlantic City at Skinny D'Amato's 500 club. In the lounge, Tony and Donna Stevenitti (a sort of South Philly version of Steve Lawrence and Eydie Gormé or Louis Prima and Keely Smith) entertain with a MEDLEY OF OTHER PEOPLE'S HITS. During their well-rehearsed patter with a message (A SONG OF PEACE), the main room opens up for the main event – The Rat Pack! Tony and Donna are promptly abandoned.

In their dressing room after the set, Donna and Tony fight with one another and their agent, Morty. Nothing is going well for them, including the lie they tell the audience that they are married. Tony has got to step up to bat and commit big time. Donna imagines a better life (I COULD GET USED TO THAT).

Morty, in a desperate act to keep his money makers together, enlists "Cruise Line Booking" and a besieged booker, Naomi. Along the way, more than a few wires are crossed. It seems NATO Undersecretary Penelope Briggs-Hopkins and CIA agent Big Apple (whose only previous exposure to entertainment was doing props for a college production of *Our Town*) are under orders to book Steve and Eydie for a NATO peace keeping cruise with world leaders. Well, with "Steve an' Eydie" and "Stevenitti", you just know some mayhem will ensue. You'll hear all about it as the ship boards in ALL ABOARD.

To add even more spice to the mix, four Russian spies have infiltrated the cruise disguised as cater waiters. One of the spies, Pavlov Pushkart, has a crush on NATO's Penelope and secretly pines for her (I'VE GOT MY EYE ON YOU).

Meanwhile, Tony and Donna are given the royal treatment only reserved for V.I.P.s., leading Donna to mistakenly believe Tony has finally stepped up his game. That night, just as they are about to take the stage for the world leaders, reality sets in when Penelope and Big Apple discover the duo is not Steve Lawrence and Eydie Gormé, and Donna realizes Tony has failed her again. As they hit the stage, the Russian cater waiters whip out their Kalashnikovs and take everyone hostage. "Tough Room," Donna quips. The unseen delegates are put in the "Useful Room," and the band is moved to a separate location on the ship. But the entertainers, along with Penelope, mistaken for an English Nanny, and Big Apple, mistaken for a choreographer, are placed in the "Useful (Not-At-All) Room." The USSR has triumphed over the western world! The four Russians (Grusha, Mimke, Pavlov and their Leader, Residu) sing a song of their well-placed overthrow, WESTERN WAYS.

Admitting a weakness for Eydie Gormé, imagine Leader Residu's surprise when he finds out he's on the same ship as his Radio Free Europe secret desire delight! He extends an invitation through Pavlov to have her meet him in his private cabin later that night.

In the "Useful (Not-At-All) Room," Donna definitively breaks up with Tony and decides to pose as Eydie to get information from Residu, despite Tony's objections (IF I WAS YOU).

Once Donna-as-Eydie arrives in Residu's state room, Residu admits to his excitement at seeing Eydie Gormé in the flesh (the bootleg cassettes he owns do not include photos). He tries to seduce her with finger-food and flattery. Donna-as-Eydie resorts to the only method she can to get information – bossa nova – while a jealous Tony eavesdrops (EYE TO EYE).

At the end of the song, Residu reveals his master plan, along with a bomb perched on a spinning antenna, which, if detonated, will cause mass destruction! At a television broadcast scheduled later that night, he will make his demands while Donna-as-Eydie sings an anthem he has written and composed. (The melody sounds suspiciously like Duke Ellington's "Satin Doll.")

Back in the "Useful (Not-At-All) Room," Donna-no-longer-Eydie tells the others of Residu's sinister plan: to hold the world leaders hostage until his demands for world domination are met. It is up to this modest foursome to save the world (WE ARE GONNA SAVE THE WORLD).

And if that's not the end of a first act, I am turning in my Dramatist's Guild membership.

Douglas Carter Beane



To begin our second act, well, it's one thing to say you're going to save the world – it's another thing to save it (HOW WE GONNA SAVE THE WORLD?).

Tony takes charge of the room, realizing the way to escape is to have Penelope flirt with Pavlov, the guard at the door. He knows there's nothing so desperate as A GUY WITHOUT A GIRL.

Once free, Tony leads Donna and Big Apple through the ship to try to get to the bomb when they are surprised by Mimke, who throws up his hands with delight. Seizing upon this gesture, Tony tells Mimke he has natural talent. Soon the three are teaching Mimke shoulder isolations and tap breaks. He drops his Kalashnikov to join the dance as Big Apple, as a choreographer, leads him away with the promise of a new dance routine.

Tony sees the band is vigorously guarded by Grusha (GRUSHA'S RANT). So as not to be discovered, he speaks the secret language of musicians to the conductor, instructing him to exploit Grusha's weakness for Latin music. The band distracts her with THE BORDER SONG.

Pavlov, a fan of western comedy, shares an intimate moment with Penelope as she confesses she used to watch Burns and Allen on BBC. Just then, Grusha and Mimke surprise them and capture Penelope. She and Pavlov know just what to do for distraction: A LITTLE SOFT SHOE.

Meanwhile, Big Apple has broken into the communication room and is talking to his chief. As he gives his coordinates, he realizes how show business is saving the world (BORN TO BE IN THE BIZ). If this cruise got any more entertaining, it would have a two-drink minimum.

All systems are go go go. Tony has located the bomb and has plans to detonate it through acrobatics that he learned while observing tumblers at Grossinger's. Donna is loving Tony, this new guy who is in charge (WHO IS THIS GUY?).

But. Alas. Residu regains control of the ship. Tony is thrown overboard, and all the "Useful (Not-At-All)" people are captured. At gunpoint and before the cameras, Residu taunts Penelope to beg to her God. Instead, Penelope chooses to give thanks (THANK YOU FOR TODAY).

Then, as the bloodshed is about to begin, Donna hears tapping on a metal pipe – a sure sign that Tony is still alive. The stage is set for THE BIG TIME. Showbusiness triumphs over evil, and all is right with the world. We have a big happy ending, because, cats, we sure could use one.

As the audience leaves, the message and feel of the show linger with this modest reminder – the EXIT MUSIC from our swinging band.



Smooth sailing,

Douglas Carter Beane

FROM L to R: August Eriksmoen, Eric Stern, Bradley Dean, Douglas Carter Beane, Diane Phelan, Douglas J. Cohen, Debbie Gravitte, Raymond Bokhour, Santino Fontana, Jackie Hoffman, Michael McCormick, Will Swenson

A TALE OF TWO MENSCHES

"If a tree falls in the forest, and there's no one around to hear it, does it make a sound?"

I've always felt musicals that go unrecorded are in danger of a similar conundrum. If a show is not currently playing, does the score languish, never to make a sound?

August Eriksmoen, Eric Stern, and I were determined that *The Big Time* be heard. We had all crossed paths many years ago, and I doubt this show would have come to fruition – let alone be recorded – had it not been for their contributions.

I first met August around 15 years ago when he was hired as the music director of *Barnstormer*, a musical I co-wrote with Cheryl L. Davis based on the life of Bessie Coleman, the first African American aviatrix. After the first day of rehearsal, August relayed a major offer had come his way, one that was too tempting to refuse. He gave me a list of at least ten capable replacements, and we both wished each other well.

But a year later, August called out of the blue to ask if I had any songs I'd like to have orchestrated for a pickup band organized by Howard Joines. It was comprised of amazing New York musicians who flexed their muscles sightreading on Saturday mornings. August volunteered to write these charts: you see, in addition to being supremely talented, he's a mensch.

August wrote six show-stopping charts for *The Big Time* over the next month. I called my collaborator Douglas Carter Beane and invited him to the next jam session in Greenwich Village. He brought a producer who, upon experiencing the score with these dynamic arrangements, decided to option our show. August was enlisted to orchestrate the rest of the score, a major regional theater announced our world premiere, and backer's auditions were scheduled downtown at Pace auditorium on Friday, September 12, 2008. The following Monday, Lehman Brothers declared bankruptcy. (Needless to say, our investors suddenly got cold feet, and the regional booking never materialized).

However, those presentations (boasting six of the eight cast members on this album) were conducted by the great Eric Stern. To watch Eric and August, two consummate professionals, working in tandem was a thing of beauty.



Douglas J. Cohen & August Eriksmoen



Flash forward to *The Big Time* enjoying a triumphant sold-out concert at Princeton's McCarter Theater on January 30th, 2020. Note that date because it was one of the last public gatherings before a 16-month pandemic hiatus. During that hibernation, August and I realized we needed to record this show...and we needed Eric, ensconced at Boston's Berklee College of Music, to conduct. In a Zoom meeting, I was bowled over when Eric said, "I have the month of August free. Tell me when, and I'll be there."

It was similar to *Field of Dreams*: "If you book the studio, he will come."

August made a similarly generous commitment. He also conferred with Bryan Crook, Music Coordinator, who put together a formidable big band. The über talented cast of *The Big Time* was fortunately available on August 29th and 30th. All of them, except for Diane Phelan, had taken part in previous readings.

In fact, I had written “The Border Song” for Jackie Hoffman and “Who Is This Guy?” for Debbie Gravitte. We had no time to rehearse, so it was extremely advantageous to work with people who “knew the score.”

With precious little time allotted to record 85% of the music, I watched in awe as Eric masterfully conducted, even sacrificing his lunch on the second day to perfect the new harmonies he crafted for the end of “All Aboard.” August, Ian Kagey, our talented and unflappable engineer, and I later met over the course of six months to edit, comp, and mix.

The result is a labor of love that I hope gives you, the listener, comparable pleasure. This musical pays tribute to performers who unite to overcome adversity. Born out of the pandemic, this album is a testament to the many artists who collaborated on a project which (to quote Donna Stevenitti, our heroine) “is near and dear to our hearts.” It’s to this intrepid company of players led by August and Eric that I’m forever grateful, “big time.”

Douglas J. Cohen



L to R: Will Swensen, Raymond Bokhor, Michael McCormick, Douglas J. Cohen, Jackie Hoffman & Eric Stern.

BELOW L to R: Engineer Ian Kagey, Sean McDaniel, Dave Phillips





TOP, L TO R: Bradley Dean, Debbie Gravitte, Will Swensen

L: Diane Phelan

BELOW: Santino Fontana & Jackie Hoffman

Acknowledgements

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This album is dedicated to Hirsch and Claudia Cohen for their invaluable support, unconditional love, and infectious laughter... and in memory of our cherished friend and colleague, Howard Joines.

THE BAND *Eric Stern,* CONDUCTOR

Trumpet 1 **TONY KADLECK**

Trumpet 2 **MANUEL RUIZ**

Trumpet 3 **SCOTT WENDHOLT**

Trumpet 4 **BRIAN PARESCHI**

Piano **JASON DeBORD**

Bass **DAVE PHILLIPS**

Drums & Percussion **SEAN McDANIEL**

Trombone 1 **SARA JACOVINO**

Trombone 2 **JASON JACKSON**

Trombone 3 (Bass) **JEN HINKLE**

Trombone 4 (Bass) **JACK SCHATZ**

Alto Sax, Flute **STEVE KENYON**

Alto Sax, Flute **BRYAN CROOK**

Tenor Sax, Clarinet **SCOTT KREITZER**

Tenor Sax, Clarinet **ALDEN BANTA**

Baritone Sax, Bass Clarinet **MARK THRASHER**

Music Coordinator **BRYAN CROOK**, Percussion Rental **ERIC POLAND**



ALBUM PRODUCED BY **AUGUST ERIKSMOEN & DOUGLAS J. COHEN**

RECORDED AND MIXED BY **IAN KAGEY**

MASTERED BY **OSCAR ZAMBRANO | ZAMPOL PRODUCTIONS**

MUSIC DIRECTOR/CONDUCTOR **ERIC STERN**

ORCHESTRATIONS **AUGUST ERIKSMOEN**

ADDITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS **NOAH LANDIS**

MUSIC COORDINATOR **BRYAN CROOK**

MUSIC PREPARATION **MICHAEL PACIFICO & JONATHAN BAUERFELD**

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thebigtimemusical.com



The Big Time

IN CONCERT!

TOP: Concert reading with the Princeton Pops at The McCarter Theatre, NJ. L to R: Raymond Bokhour, Bradley Dean, Jackie Hoffman, Michael McCormick, Debbie Gravitte & Santino Fontana.

BELOW: Backstage with "The Usual Suspects." L to R: Santino Fontana, Will Swensen, Raymond Bokhour, Bradley Dean & Michael McCormick.

