

GEORGE M. COHAN, *Book, Music and Lyrics*, was born, quite logically on the Fourth of July, 1878, in Providence, R.I. His parents, Helen and Jeremiah Cohan, were vaudevillians who lost little time arranging their son's theatrical debut; he was carried on stage at the age of four months. Ten years later George, together with his parents and sister, Josephine, were delighting audiences throughout the country as "The Four Cohans." Soon George would show his versatility as a performer, writer and composer of their material, as well as business manager. In 1901 one of their vaudeville acts was expanded into a full-length musical, *The Governor's Son*, featuring the Four Cohans, plus the popular singing comedienne, Ethel Levey, who had recently become the first Mrs. George M. Cohan. (Following their divorce in 1907 another actress, Agnes Nolan became the second Mrs. Cohan.)

A series of bright, fast-moving Cohan musicals followed almost annually into the 'teens. Mostly, these did not fare too well on Broadway but enjoyed long, successful tours. Aside from Cohan's engaging and dynamic stage personality, the main distinction of these shows were his hit songs. "You're a Grand Old Flag," "Mary's a Grand Old Name," and of course "Yankee Doodle Boy" and "Give My Regards to Broadway" from the current show — all these are still sing-along favorites after more than seventy years. And when our country entered World War I in 1917, it was Cohan's stirring "Over There" which became a sort of unofficial national anthem. None other than Enrico Caruso made a thrilling record of it which became a national best seller. The song, together with "You're a Grand Old Flag," were responsible in later years for Cohan receiving a Congressional Medal of Honor from President Roosevelt.

A few more Cohan musicals came along during the twenties. Although more conventional in style than the early shows, they were bigger hits on Broadway.

Cohan made several films including *The Phantom President* (1932) in which he sang three Rodgers and Hart numbers. Five years later he portrayed an anything-but-phantom president, Franklin D. Roosevelt, in the Broadway musical *I'd Rather Be Right*, once again with a Rodgers and Hart score.

Best known for his musicals, Cohan was also noted for his straight acting roles, especially in Eugene O'Neill's *Ah, Wilderness*. Not long before

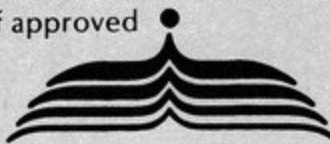


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Cohan's death in 1942, he was brilliantly portrayed by James Cagney in *Yankee Doodle Dandy*, one of Hollywood's outstanding musicals, and it's gratifying to know that the Yankee Doodle Boy himself approved of it highly.

In 1968 he was given another tribute when Joel Grey starred at New York's Palace Theatre in *George M.*, a panorama of Cohan's life and songs. It ran for over a year.

—Alfred Simon



LITTLE JOHNNY JONES

The inspiration for *Little Johnny Jones* came to Cohan when he read newspaper stories about the adventures of Tod Sloan, a famous American jockey who had gone to London in 1903 to ride in the English Derby. Cohan developed an original and exciting plot, with an ideal role for his own unique personality and talents.

Together with Sam H. Harris whom he had just joined as a producing partner, they tried out *Little Johnny Jones* first at the Parsons Theatre in Hartford on October 10, 1904. Supporting Cohan were his father as Anthony Anstey, his mother as Mrs.

Kenworth, and his wife Ethel Levey as Goldie Gates. Hartford audiences embraced the show. *Little Johnny Jones* opened at New York's Liberty Theatre on November 7, and after 52 performances took to the road with great success. Changes were made on tour and the show came back to Broadway twice, first in May 1905 for four months, and again that November for several weeks. So, *Little Johnny Jones* turned out to be a Broadway hit after all, with over 200 performances. Mervyn LeRoy directed a Warner Brothers film of *Little Johnny Jones* in 1930 starring Eddie Buzzell and Alice Day.

—Alfred Simon