A COMPREHENSIVE STUDY AND DESIGN FOR THE MUSICAL
THE ROTHSCILDS

A Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Fine Arts

by

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The Ohio State University
1981

Approved by

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DEDICATION

I gratefully wish to thank my mother and step-father for all their love and support. I would also like to thank all those people who have helped and inspired me from the moment I began my education and career in theatre.
NOTE

A Complete illustrated copy of this thesis, A COMPREHENSIVE STUDY AND DESIGN FOR THE MUSICAL THE ROTHSCILDS, is located in the Department of Theatre, the Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio.
AUTHOR

The book for The Rothschilds was Sherman Yellen's first Broadway musical. Prior to the show, for which he received a Tony award nomination, he had written the sketch "Delicious Indignities" for the revue Oh! Calcutta! in 1968. He also wrote numerous television plays including "City of Angels" for the Hallmark Hall of Fame in December of 1963. In 1961, he received the Hallmark award for television drama for the play "Time Out of Marble."¹

COMPOSER AND LYRICIST

Jerry Bock and Sheldon Harnick, the composer and lyricist of The Rothschilds, worked as a team before their 1970 venture. They met in a bar in New York in 1956, and within two years they received the Pulitzer prize for Fiorello!. In 1960, they produced Tenderloin; although it was not nearly as popular as their previous show, the critics believed it contained a much better and more powerful musical score.²

In 1963, Broadway audiences saw Bock and Harnick's efforts in She Loves Me. At the same time, the duo were

¹
²
working on their soon-to-be-acclaimed Fiddler on the Roof. Fiddler opened in 1964 and ran on Broadway for over 3,200 performances. In 1966, the two collaborated on The Apple Tree; unlike their previous shows, they wrote the book as well as the score. The show was not well received and ran for only 463 performances. This failure initiated a series of disagreements which eventually destroyed Bock and Harnich's working relationship after their final show together--The Rothschilds.

Many problems existed for the men as they struggled to complete their final show. Their major disagreements arose over working on "another Jewish musical." 3 The spark and freshness that existed during their collaboration on Fiddler was not there with the later musical and, as a consequence, the men fought to complete the score and bring their successful working relationship to an end.
HISTORY OF MUSICAL AND PRODUCTION

The Rothschilds was adapted from the first fifty pages of Frederic Morton's 1961 novel, The Rothschilds: A Family Portrait. To write this biographical novel, Morton traced the historic Rothschild dynasty back to its beginnings in Frankfort, Germany, in the 1760s and then followed the family's paths of luck to fortune and power to the present day.

The musical deals with the first forty-six years when a small family takes hold and blossoms into an invincible financial power. Sherman Yellen described a poor sensitive Jew who, without the aid of a crystal ball to see into the future, managed to establish an improbable banking dynasty in an impossible era. The time was the French Revolution and, against all odds, one impoverished Jewish family locked behind the thick walls of the Frankfort ghetto established the beginnings of a financial network which eventually encompassed the entire European continent.

The Rothschilds opened on Broadway at the Lunt-Fontanne Theatre Monday, October 19, 1970. The musical ran for 505 performances and closed January 2, 1972. The show starred
Hal Linden as Mayer, Keen Curtis as Prince William, Leila Martin as Gutele, and Jill Clayburgh as Hannah. In 1971, Hal Linden received a Tony award for Best Actor and Keene Curtis for Best Supporting Actor. In May of 1972, the musical toured to the west coast (San Francisco) with a new cast except for Hal Linden who continued his award-winning role as Mayer.

The production received mixed reviews from the New York critics. In general, the critics enjoyed the visual aspects of the production with its lavish sets and costumes by John Bury, lighting by Richard Pilbrow, and direction and choreography by Michael Kidd. The critics agreed that the production was well cast—the perfect vehicle for both Hal Linden and Keene Curtis; but assigned the musical's weakness and flaws to the script itself. Walter Kerr believed the weakness to be in the shift of focus in the second act. Mayer is the central figure and focal point of Act One. The audience enjoyed his warmth and humor, the poor Jew who tries to manipulate the upper-class aristocrats by selling them petty, old coins and playing clerk to the upper-class bankers. In Act Two, the focus turns first to Mayer's son, Nathan, and England, and then to the power struggle of the five sons as they try to follow in their father's footsteps.
The warmth and humor pervading in Act One dissolved, and the sympathy for the family was lost in the cold financial struggle between the Rothschild sons and the European royalty at Aix-La-Chapelle.

Clive Barnes said of the script:

Mr. Yellen's book has to face the difficulty of making a gripping story about bankers who don't even have the grace to go broke once in a while. In part he solves this with a digression about Nathan Rothschild, and his wooing and winning of Hannah Cohen. It provides two of the evening's best scenes but also detracts from the steady development of the story. But history dealt Mr. Yellen a difficult hand of cards, and he had to play them the best he could.9

When the musical first opened, it was quickly compared with Fiddler on the Roof and considered as just "another Jewish musical" and not even a particularly good one at that!9 If the script was scrutinized carefully, noted Clive Barnes, The Rothschilds resembled 1776 more than Fiddle. Both musicals "had the same underlying seriousness, the same stress upon character and the same widespread opportunities for its cast to act."10 If the show is compared with Fiddle, the musicals have two similarities: Jews and the same composer and lyricist. That is where the similarities end. The Rothschilds is based on true people and incidents while Fiddler is a made-up story of ethnic warmth and flavor.
One critic made an interesting point in relation to the two Jewish musicals; "One irreverent showgoer suggested at the end of the performance that the five Rothschild sons are the obvious answer to the problem of Teyve's five marriageable daughters in Fiddler."
SCRIPT ANALYSIS

The musical was a product of the joint efforts of Yellen, Bock, and Harnick as they came together this one time to create a script from Morton's documentary novel. The trio had never worked together before--nor have they since--so this show must be studied in view of itself without considerations of the creators' previous works. Simply The Rothschilds is a musical about the beginning of the Rothschild dynasty in Germany and England from 1772-1818.

Play Synopsis

The musical is in two acts.

Prologue: Germany, 1772

The song "Pleasure and Privilege" sets the prevailing upper class attitude throughout the script -- that is, that everyone is lower and unworthy of association with the aristocracy:

"Would you care to enter
This gay and gilded sphere?
How much would you pay to be included here?
Make your highest offer
But bear this thought in mind:
Your bid may be rejected if you're
Not our kind (prologue)

Act 1 sc. 1: Outside the Frankfort ghetto.

We meet Mayer for the first time as he approaches the ghetto wall. He is confronted by some urchins who say he must "do his duty" which means take off his hat and bow, because Jews are the lowest class of people. He does so and then pays the guard so he can enter the walled-in ghetto. The scene ends with an off-stage voice singing, "Jews and aliens of Frankfort cease all trade and traffic, and remain confined in your homes until morning. The ghetto is closed."

Act 1 sc. 2: Mayer's shop.

Mayer enters the shop to find Gutele, his wife-to-be, waiting for him. She expects him to take her away from the ghetto to Hanover where they can be married but he has decided to live in the ghetto and open a second-hand store. He describes how the shop will be, how they will make money, and how he will sell coins at the coming fair.

Act 1 sc. 3: A City street--the fair.

Mayer attempts to sell coins to fairgoers and finds that he is very successful. Prince William enters with his
aid, Buderus, and finds Mayer very amusing. Mayer offers a precious coin to the Prince if the Prince in turn will allow him to marry. The Prince humorously agrees.

Act 1 sc. 4: Prince William's study.

Mayer visits the Prince to sell more coins. He proves that he is wittier than the Prince's bankers and then talks the bankers into hiring him as their go-between with the Prince. After this small success Mayer looks into his future and sees that he needs a family—sons to attain the money and power he desires.

Act 1 sc. 5: Mayer's shop, 1788.

Mayer takes his four sons to go to work in the shop.

Act 1 sc. 6: Mayer's shop.

The boys are working in the shop. They show their skill when dealing with the customers—they show the quick wit which in the years to follow benefit them greatly. The scene ends with the ghetto being attacked—a pogrom, a common occurrence.

Act 1 sc. 7: Mayer's shop, 1802.

The scene starts with the end of a pogrom. The boys have all grown up and like their father are not satisfied
existing in the ghetto while other folks have "everything."

Act 1 sc. 8: Prince William's study, 1804.

Father and sons visit the Prince to offer him their services as bankers. The Prince is taken back but finally agrees to use them with his Danish loan. At the same time the French army led by Fouche enters town and threatens the people. The Prince must flee Frankfort.

Act 1 sc. 9: Mayer's shop.

Mayer decides to send his sons abroad to work for the exiled Prince even though his country has been invaded. He sends Nathan to England, Solomon to Vienna, Jacob to Prague, Kalmen to Hamburg, and Amshel to Prussia.

Act 2 sc. 1: London street, 1805.

Having just arrived in London, Nathan observes the bankers at the stock exchange. He listens to some "tips" and makes a bad deal. He talks with his father and apologizes for the financial loss.

Act 2 sc. 2: Stock exchange, 1806.

Nathan has prospered and is respected by all. Hannah enters the exchange to get Nathan to donate money to one
of her worthy causes. Nathan immediately falls in love
with her.

Act 2 sc. 3: Hannah's garden.

Nathan woos Hannah and they agree to marry only after
Nathan promises to loan the English government money to help
finance the war.

Act 2 sc. 4: Mayer's shop.

Metternich enters the ghetto and asks the now prosperous
Mayer for money to finance armies against Bonaparte.
Mayer agrees after he is promised that after the war, the
Jewish people will be aided and the ghetto restrictions
abolished.

Act 2 sc. 5: Aix-La-Chapelle, 1818.

The war is over and the aristocracy is celebrating.
Mayer and Amshel go to talk to Metternich about the promises
made years ago. Metternich ignores them.

Act 2 sc. 6: Mayer's shop.

The boys are angered that the pact has been broken so
they decided to retaliate by flooding the market with old
war bonds as the wealthy try to sell new bonds at a higher
price.
Act 2 sc. 7: Aix-La-Chapelle

The boys flood the market with their bonds and show their skill at manipulating the aristocracy. The rich panic and realize they have been beatened.

Act 2 sc. 8: Mayer's shop

Metternich returns to the ghetto once more to bargain and do what he promised—a declaration of rights for Jews.

The script's metaphor is the family unit. Judaism is based on family ties and the carrying on of the faith with future generations. This is the basis for Mayer's actions—everything he does is for his sons. In Act One, scene one Mayer says he will not always be poor, he will be able to support his wife and sons "that's what it's all for." In scene four Mayer dreams of having sons.

Sons . . . I need sons!
Princes? Why not kings?
Alone, I can do just so much,
I can go just so far.
But with sons... . .

In the next scene Mayer's sons go to work in his shop, and again Mayer sings of them:

Sons grow up to be partners
Sons grow up to be heirs
Why should strangers inherit
What's not rightfully theirs?
I have been blessed with gold;
Four sons, to shape . . . and mold!

In scene eight Mayer takes his sons to visit the Prince
and have them continue the banking tradition that he has
started for them. He then sends them away from Frankfort
to establish the Rothschilds all over Europe. In Act Two
the boys continue the success that their father began. The
family unit then enlarges to include the Jewish people in
the ghetto as Mayer attains the power to help aid and
rectify a declaration of rights for the Jews.

The major problem with the script is that it appears to
be three fragmented stories rather than a single developed
idea. Act One is a play about Mayer Rothschild and his
pursuit of a livelihood. He wants two things out of life—
money and sons. He achieves these by the end of Act One.
Act Two begins as the story of Nathan arriving in London
eager to achieve fame and fortune. By the end of the third
scene he has become wealthy and has found the girl of his
dreams. The rest of the act becomes Mayer's story of
acceptance among the aristocracy. Having already achieved
financial gain Mayer, now proves he has the power to manipu-
late the aristocracy. He manages to beat the wealthy at
their own game and figuratively breaks down the ghetto walls which have closed off the Jews from the rest of the world for so many years.

Along with the script the musical numbers enhance the scenes by their complete incorporation within the script. "The score of 20 musical numbers are so firmly integrated in the plot and action that they lose individual identity." Bock and Harnick created the stiff world of the rich aristocracy and juxtaposed it musically with the colorful life of the Rothschilds locked behind the walls of the ghetto.

Harold Clurman said that the play's failure was due "not because the book is so persistently a success story, but because it is more documentary than drama." That may have been true in 1971 when Mr. Clurman critiqued the production, however, that does not seem to hold true on the New York stage in 1980. The documentary theme is very much a part of the theatre. Evita by Tim Rice and Andrew Webber is a documentary show which is a success story. Another popular documentary play is The Elephant Man by Bernard Pomerance. These two popular examples of the documentary form indicate the possibility that Clurman was wrong in his statement, and that a production of The Rothschilds might
achieve more success today than it did when it was first produced.
DESIGN CONCEPT

The Rothschilds is about a family's rise to power through financial gain. The poor Jew, Mayer Rothschild, realized that in his world of the 1770s the only way to become "someone" and to equal those people outside the Jewish ghetto, was to amass money. The show is about the family's methods of obtaining money to reach a height of power to equal to the aristocrats of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

The Rothschilds shows the struggle of the Jews as they penetrate the rich world of the aristocracy, first as awkward foreigners and eventually as financial equals. Every encounter with the aristocracy brings the family closer to the power they desire, but the separation between them and the wealthy never diminishes. This division between the royalty and the ghetto is emphasized throughout the script and carries through to all phases of the production design.
SCENE DESIGN CONCEPT

In the scene design, I wanted to separate physically the world of the aristocracy from that of the ghetto. This physical separation exists for the Rothschild family and is the ultimate barrier which is never completely overcome—even after the boys demonstrate their power and outwit the aristocrats at their own game. This separation is achieved by the choice of color and the style of structure used to symbolize the two unique worlds. The world of the wealthy uses a step and platform unit which is symmetrical in shape and always played center stage. The symmetrical placement for the aristocracy indicates their constant consideration of appearance: always balanced, always perfect at face value. This is first realized in the production number in the prologue with the song "Pleasure and Privilege," when the aristocrats are concerned only with their appearances.

See the pampered faces,
Regard the costly clothes:
Every carefree figure in a courtly pose.
Sniff the fragrant powder,
And smell the scented oil;
Note the slender fingers that have not known toil.
A world of pleasure and privilege,
Elegant, elite,
A private arcadia
Where life is sweet.

The ghetto scenes use a two-story house unit which is set off-center when in use. The off-balanced placement indicates the uncertainty in which the Rothschild family find themselves in each situation. When they are first introduced Mayer has no idea what his future will be—he is not even allowed to marry Gutele. With each scene, Mayer and his boys encounter new obstacles which cause them to sway continually between possible success or failure.

Along with the structural differences, different color ranges separate the worlds of the play. The wealthy world is light and cool in color: England and Aix-La-Chapelle are both light, grey marbles, and Prince William's study is white and blue. The ghetto scenes are warm tones (very earthy to show the Jews as "the salt of the earth" while the aristocrats are superficial and above all else), basically browns and ambers, going toward green as Nathan woos in her garden.

The two worlds are tied together by the linear quality painted in all the scenery. The style was inspired by the German cubist Lyonel Feininger who seemed to capture the colors and forms that I believe represented the Jewish
ghetto, while bringing a lightness and humor to his works and the flat linear style for which he is best known. All the drops and flying pieces are painted in this flat style as is the show portal. The portal represents the pinnacle of the Rothschild's success as visualized at the end of the show. It contains the warm colors of their ghetto past and their coat of arms which represents the power and respect they gained throughout the world.
LIGHTING DESIGN CONCEPT

I wanted to re-emphasize the division of the Rothschilds and the aristocrats with the lighting as with the scenery. The family scenes are all lit in warm tones (ambers) with a lot of side and back lighting to mold the characters' features. The aristocratic scenes are lit very flatly with mainly front-of-house lighting in cool colors (blues and lavenders), to enhance the superficial, two-dimensional qualities of the wealthy. One example is in the beginning of Act Two when Nathan arrives in London. He is in a separate pool of warm light, lit from the sides, while the banking chorus is washed in cooler lavender and blue front on. This same idea recurs when the boys go to Aix-La-Chapelle to sell the old war bonds. Their lights grow progressively warmer, while the chorus become cooler as the boys take over the scene and manipulate the Austrians into buying their old bonds.
COSTUME DESIGN CONCEPT

The Rothschilds is an historical piece that covers the social and political situations that existed in Germany and England from 1772-1818. The costumes, more than any other aspect of the production best reflect the social situations, attitudes, and time span of the production. The musical is designed with the accurate silhouettes of the period because the continuous references to historical events which cannot be ignored or pushed aside, i.e., the existence of the poor Jews in the Frankfort ghetto at the end of the eighteenth century, or Bonaparte and the way in which the French Revolution affected life in Germany and England. The aristocracy are depicted in light colors, rich saturated colors, and heavy trims. All detail work is elaborate to the point of being too much—too heavy and too artificial. The costumes reflect the superficial attitudes of the characters (once again the epitome of the first production number).

Prince William, Fouche, Herries, Metternich, and all the chorus (when staged with these characters) represent
the upperclass. Prince William is the height of aristocracy from the moment he enters the stage. He is dressed in high fashion in cream satin coat and breeches with pearl trim, striped vest, lacy shirt and jabot, white stockings, walking stick, and highly-powdered wig. Fouche is dressed as a high military official for his brief scenes. In comparison to the soldiers who accompany him, he richly displays the wealth and power of Bonaparte with his fancy uniform, impressive medals, and bicorn. In act two Herries, the English aristocrat is dressed in a fashionable high-collared coat, lacy jabot and shirt, top hat, and a sash to indicate his governmental status. Finally Metternich, who represents the old and established aristocracy of Europe is dressed in formal court attire including matching breeches, cape and coat with medals, sash, and ceremonial sword.

The ghetto characters and the Rothschild family are costumed to contrast these aristocratic characters. They are dressed in warm, earthy tones, very muted, ragged and distressed. When Mayer is first seen as he enters the ghetto he is wearing short, ragged brown breeches, dark grey coat with a Jewish armband, greyish stockings, old shoes and an old tri-corn hat. Later when he visits the Prince 30 years later he is dressed in a period coat, shirt
with a small lace jabot, white stockings, black shoes, black pants, dark vest, and newer hat. The boys are also dressed in old ragged clothes out of coarse, textured fabrics—plain shirts, breeches, vests, and aprons. The quality of the family's clothes increases as the family attains wealth, but they remain austere and within the same earthy color range as the old clothes. The Rothschild's money is not showned outwardly in fancy dress, but to acquire power to dominate those who are inclined to dress elaborately.
SHIFT ANALYSIS

All scene shifts are quick and smooth and look effortless to the audience. Most changes happen in full or partial view of the audience so that when the large units need to revolve, they are turned by chorus members from previous rather than by crew members. The other units either fly in on the counterweight system or are set in place by a tracked system with electronically-controlled winches.

Preshow: step unit in
          shield in
          Frankfort #1 drop in

End of overture: shield out

End of prologue: Frankfort #2 drop in
                 Frankfort #1 out
                 step unit out
                 house unit in
                 wall units in (both stage right and stage left)

End of scene 1: wall units out
                house unit spun
During scene 8 (cont.):
  windows out
  Prince pallet out

End of scene 8:
  Frankfort #2 in
  Frankfort #3 out
  house unit in
  roof piece in

Intermission:
  shield in
  house out
  roof out
  Frankfort #2 out
  England drop in
  step unit in with bannister
  window/door unit flown in

End of overture:
  shield out

During scene 1:
  pallet with Mayer and Gutele (stage left)

End of scene 1:
  pallet out
  window/door slightly raised
  step unit spun by cast members
  window/doors lowered
  pillars flown in
  pallet with Mayer and Gutele--in and out on cues

End of scene 2:
  window/door unit out
  pillars out
End of scene 1 (cont.):
roof piece flown in

End of scene 2:
Frankfort #3 drop in
Frankfort #2 out
roof piece out
house unit out (stage left)
fountain unit in (stage right)

End of scene 3:
Frankfort #1 in
Frankfort #3 out
fountain out
Prince pallet in (tracked)
windows flown in

End of scene 4:
Frankfort #2 in
Frankfort #1 out
Prince pallet out
windows out
house unit in--with furniture and furnishings
roof piece in

End of scene 7:
Frankfort #1 in
Frankfort #2 out
roof piece out
house unit out
Prince pallet in
windows in

During scene 8:
Frankfort #3 in
Frankfort #1 out
End of scene 2 (cont.):
step unit out
house unit in (upstage spike)

During scene 3:
trees in
garden pallet in
house out

During scene 3:
garden pallet out
trees out
house in
roof in
Frankfort #2 in
England out

End of scene 4:
Vienna drop in
Frankfort drop #2 out
house unit out
roof out
step unit in—with furniture
chandelier in

End of scene 5:
Frankfort #2 in
Vienna out
chandelier out
roof piece in
step unit out
house in

End of scene 6:
Frankfort #2 out
Vienna in
End of scene 6 (cont.):
roof piece out
chandelier in
step unit in
house out

End of scene 7:
house unit in
step unit out
Frankfort #2 in
Vienna out
chandelier out
roof piece in

End of curtain call: shield in
FOOTNOTES

1 Clare D. Kinsman and Mary Ann Tennehouse, ed., Contemporary Authors, vols. 29-32, p. 106.

2 Martin Gottfried, Broadway Musicals, p. 86.


4 Gottfried, p. 88.

5 Gottfried, p. 88.

6 Gottfried, p. 87.


9 Clive Barnes, p. 184.

10 Clive Barnes, p. 184.


12 Variety, p. 59.

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