



**Smithsonian Institution**

*National Museum of African American History and Culture*

## **Playbill for A Flea in Her Ear**

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A sparkling cast breathes new life into High Society

WHAT A SWELL PARTY THIS IS  
by Harry Haun

Wendy Hiller, Ava Gardner, both Hepburns, Mary Martin, the Princess of Monaco, Julie Andrews--it should be clear by now that Melissa Errico, in her five-year Broadway career, knows no fear about slipping into a [[image: colour photograph of a man and woman dancing on a stage]] [[image: inset colour photograph of a woman looking to her left with her hand on her chest]] [[caption: The privileged classes enjoying their privileges: Melissa Errico (left) stars as Tracy Lord in High Society. Above: Errico and Stephen Bogardus (as reporter Mike Connor) role that becomes a legend most. It's her specialty--from Eliza Doolittle to Venus to Maj. Barbara Undershaft--and it's not until later, when she looks back over her shoulder, that the quivers set in.

"Oh, Audrey Hepburn. Just Audrey Hepburn," she chirps with mock matter-of-factness about her Broadway bow, at age 21 (!), in My Fair Lady. "I thought, 'God! How did I do that so early on?'"

Four years later, she solidified her star status playing the Goddess of Love for five performances of One Touch of Venus in the City Center Encores! series--and, again, "I don't know how I pulled that off. My mother has always said I was like a race horse at the gate. You just let me go, and I go. The more time I have to analyze myself, the more I get bogged down in self-criticism."

The latest and, to date, most outrageous example of Errico daredevilry is High Society's Tracy Lord (formerly of Philadelphia and Newport and now--at the St. James Theatre in Arthur Kopit's adaptation, with a Cole Porter score and additional lyrics by Susan Birkenhead--Oyster Bay. When Philip Barry created the character in The Philadelphia Story for Katharine Hepburn to do onstage and screen, she was a Main Line blueblood whose "intolerance for human frailty" elevated her somehow and put her on this unapproachable perch, a goddess to be worshipped rather than loved. Much like the statue of Venus coming to life from a kiss by a department-store window dresser, love levels Lord: it brings her down to earth and humanizes her so she can play with other mortals (most ardently: her ex, her next and the reporter who has come to cover her second wedding).

"I like the fact that Tracy's not the obvious heroine," says Errico. "When you first meet her, she's a cruel, confident perfectionist. Everything she does, she dos with bravado, and that's a hard way for an audience to meet the leading lady--this whirlwind of opinions and judgements. What I like is she's very complex, almost unlikable; then, as the play progresses, she peels away this armor she has built. . . and you find someone who suddenly knows nothing."

Cole Porter, the musical match for

[[box, grey background, black text]] CLUE #4--FOR PHOTO #4 ON PAGE 6:  
Bebe Neuwirth continues to wow audiences nightly with her dynamic version of "All That Jazz" in this Kander and Ebb musical.



16 [[box with yellow background, black text, "WWW.PLAYBILL.COM]]

[[image: arrow]] [[text transitions fro orange to purple]] PURE  
THEATRE ONLINE

[[end page]]  
[[next page]]

Before you jump on-line  
look to see who's holding the net.

[image - drawing with Green background with white flowers. A little boy  
is sitting looking at 3 ugly creatures.]]

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[Box with dark blue and dark turquoise background]  
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