



**Smithsonian Institution**

*National Museum of African American History and Culture*

## **Playbill for The Piano Lesson**

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BROADWAY BABIES continued made into a star, and Vereen's sinuous, pelvic-grinding routine in the war sequence became famous when captured in the first successful television advertisement for a Broadway show. In his last two shows, *Dancin'* (1978) and *Big Deal* (1986), Fosse did away with collaborators altogether. No one had ever dared attempt a full evening of unrelated show dance numbers, but by 1978, Fosse was star enough in his own right that the electrifying series of numbers that was *Dancin'* was able to attract audiences for over four years on Broadway. *Big Deal*, on the other hand, was a story-and-song show, but Fosse wrote it, basing it on an Italian film called *Big Deal on Madonna Street*, and, rather than commissioning a new score, took old standards and bent them to his staging concepts in this story of depression-era Chicago. It featured the last gaudy Fosse showstopper, "Beat Me Daddy Eight To The Bar."

#### GOWER CHAMPION

Unlike Jerome Robbins and Bob Fosse, eight-time Tony-winner Gower Champion worked almost exclusively on conventional musicals, but he was a surreptitious innovator. Even with shows featuring standard book scenes interrupted by songs, he managed to make an entire evening dance. By combining subtly artistic craftsmanship with standard razzle-dazzle, he raised even the strongest shows he worked on to a higher plateau. His real breakthrough came when he directed and choreographed *Bye Bye Birdie* in 1960. A thoroughly conventional, unpretentious and irresistible show, it allowed Champion to take charge and create fresh, bright numbers which included a phalanx of teen-agers tying up the phone lines while confined in a multi-tiered box. *Birdie* marked the only time a star dancer, in this case Chita Rivera, had the lead in a Champion show, and Champion took advantage of the situation by giving Rivera a dream ballet in which she considered various methods of having her boyfriend done away with, a number with out-of-control Shriners, and an eleven o'clock solo called "Spanish Rose." But it was Champion's stylized evocation of turn-of-the-century New York in the 1964 blockbuster *Hello, Dolly!* that proved to be the ultimate conventional musical staging of its day. It contained the greatest series of bravura numbers in a single musical, and there was an artfulness about their staging that set Champion's work apart from the standard professionalism of the period. Champion's final Tony Award was a posthumous one, for another series of lavish production numbers for *42nd Street* in 1981.

#### SADDLER, GENNARO, LAYTON and FIELD

If Robbins, Kidd, Fosse and Champion dominated the field during the fifties and sixties, there were other Tony-winning choreographers who made their mark. Donald Saddler won Tonys for the urban freneticism of 1953's *Wonderful Town* and for setting Ruby Keeler, Helen Gallagher and Bobby Van tapping on Broadway again in the 1971 revival of *No, No, Nanette*. Peter Gennaro staged dances for such hits as *Fiorello!* and *The Unsinkable Molly Brown*, then won a Tony in 1977 for *Annie*. Joe Layton burst upon the Broadway scene as choreographer of *The Sound of Music* in 1959. Quickly moving into direction, Layton's Tonys were for his strikingly contemporary staging of the Richard Rodgers musical *No Strings* (1962) and for the rousing series of production numbers he staged for Joel Grey as George M. Cohan in *George M!* (1968). The late Ron Field was honored for *Applause* and for *Cabaret*, in which he staged the wickedly comic numbers led by M.C. Joel Grey which commented on the action which they interrupted.



MASTER THEATER QUIZ -- #5

Which television star won a Tony in a revival of Fosse musical? (a) Daly  
(b) Lansbury (c) Neuirth

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[[full page image]]

Gap pocket-t \$10.50,  
and jeans \$32, as worn by  
KEVIN ANDERSON, actor

INCLINED. It's a penchant for the unexpected. Gap.

[[left margin]] THE GAP 1990 [/left margin]]

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