



FOUNDED 1809

AMERICA'S OLDEST THEATRE – PHILADELPHIA'S MOST POPULAR THEATRE COMPANY

**WALNUT STREET THEATRE**

**825 Walnut Street • Visit us at [WalnutStreetTheatre.org](http://WalnutStreetTheatre.org)**

# Seeing the Stage Through Our Eyes

Feature Articles for *The King and I*

Jessica Markowitz

*The King and I* by Richard Rodgers (music) and Oscar Hammerstein III (lyrics) is a lavish play set in the palace of Siam in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. It follows English schoolteacher Anna through her stay with the King, who wishes to integrate Western science into his ruling. The ensuing culture clash is uproariously funny at times and heart wrenching at others.

An especially enchanting aspect of the play is the play within it: a Siamese rendition of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Stowe. It intrinsically holds such ironic humor. A play within a play is simply ridiculous. Yet it is there and beautiful to behold.

The stylistics within *Uncle Tom's Cabin* are largely altered compared to the actual production. The costuming appears to be traditional formalwear mixed with ballet attire such as tutus and tights. Obstacles are represented symbolically rather than realistically. An undulating, long, blue cloth intended to be a river is one of many such examples.

The differences between the Walnut's rendition and the way it was portrayed in the movie *The King and I* are truly striking. The latter is not a ballet, although the movement in it is definitely choreographed. A major plot element that differs is the motherhood of the main character, Elisa. The absence of this element in the Walnut's performance is unfortunate, as in the movie it grounds the action and lends each obstacle a new level of peril. Even so, the Walnut's interpretation is enjoyable and affecting in its own right.

Although the idea of a play within a play may seem novel for its absurdity, such elements have been present for centuries. Famed playwright Shakespeare himself tried his hand at a play within a play in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. While Shakespeare only seemed to be after comic relief, Rodgers and Hammerstein III conveyed a clear anti-slavery message and expressed the feelings of a character simultaneously. But no matter how one looks at the play within a play, the bottom line is that it holds tremendous charm.

Samantha Roffman

Before seeing *The King and I*, I discussed the musical's plot with my grandmother. She told me that the show was based on a true story, and that she read that it was uncertain how true the story was. I knew from taking a playwriting class, that when something says “based on true events,” the basis for the events can be vague. I remember my teacher saying that, “all that means is that the house the play is set in existed somewhere.” Knowing this, I set out to discover which details from *The King and I* about Anna Leonowens are considered true.

The musical is based on the book *Anna and the King of Siam* by Margaret Landon, which is based on *The English Governess at the Siamese Court* by Anna Leonowens. Both books cover Leonowens' time in Siam. Thailand's government—present day Siam—denounces both books, deeming them all inaccurate.

When Anna's father tried to marry her off, she ran away and lived with a clergyman. The musical mentions that Anna had an affair with the British delegate Sir Edward Ramsay; perhaps he is supposed to represent the clergyman Anna lived with? Anna married Thomas Leonowens, and had two children with him, a daughter and a son. After her husband passed away, Anna took a position in Siam as a tutor to the King's children—it is unknown whether it was King Rama IV, or King Mongkut. She took her son with her, and sent her daughter to England. In the musical, Anna's son Louis is with her, but she does not mention having a daughter. In her memoirs, Anna takes credit for influencing the westernization of Siam, but the fact that the King hired an English governess says that he was interested in western customs.

At this point in time, the only details from the musical that can be considered one hundred percent accurate are: that after her husband died, Anna Leonowens traveled to Siam to tutor the King's children, and that while she was there some western customs were introduced to the country.

Alyssa Marino

Leading ladies seem to be a common theme among Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals. These women seem to have more things in common than they do differences. Take for instance, three of the most beloved Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals, *The King and I*, *The Sound of Music* and *South Pacific*. *The King and I* currently playing at The Walnut Street Theatre until January 8<sup>th</sup>, features the story of the westerner Anna and her journey to Siam to educate the King's children. *The Sound of Music* focuses on a young Austrian woman, Maria, who leaves her life in an Abby to be a governess to the seven Von Trapp children during the Nazi invasion of Austria. *South Pacific* tells of American nurse Nellie Forbush's days in the South Pacific when the Japanese were on thin ice with America in the midst of World War II.

All three ladies venture forth to a land unknown and suffer from sweaty palms and elephant size heartbeats. Each of them calms their fears using a special trick. Anna "Whistles a Happy Tune", Nellie sings about hope in a "Cockeyed Optimist", while Maria sings "I Have Confidence". They are hopeless romantics and all it takes is a few steps of a waltz to realize they are in love with their leading men. Ultimately, all women leave or threaten to leave their situations, only to return. While they are all outspoken, Anna proves to be the most brazen. During her time in Siam, Anna not only stands her ground on what she was promised, she also questions eastern culture and reprimands the King for ordering the physical punishment of one of his wives. Although frustrating to the King, Anna's intelligent and principled outspokenness wins him over. Rachel York, who currently plays Anna at The Walnut Street Theatre, states that Anna is "a very delicate and refined woman with great empathy, but she won't be pushed around. She has a very strong will and moral compass. To play her on stage is very moving and rewarding. The show brings me to tears every night."

Emily Moylan

Rodgers and Hammerstein's *The King and I*, which is playing at the Walnut Street Theater from November 5<sup>th</sup> until January 5<sup>th</sup>, is based off actual events that are told in the novel written in 1944 by Margaret Landon entitled, "Anna and the King of Siam". Miss Landon got her ideas for the novel from the memoirs, "The English Governess at the Siamese Court" and "The Romance of the Harem", which were written by the actual Anna Leonowens, who is portrayed in this musical.

This musical deals with the differences in western and eastern cultures during the mid-1800s. The King of Siam, played by Mel Sagrado Maghuyop, hires an English governess by the name of Anna Leonowens, played by Broadway actress Rachel York, to teach his many children western scientific values. He considers himself superior to all people, especially women, and Anna, who lived in a place where women had gained respect from men, would not take any of his nonsense. During the King's time in power, various European countries, as well as American traders, were determined to secure dominance over Southeast Asia. In order to save his country, he had to familiarize his royal court with Western ideas. The King and Anna were both full of pride, and a little stubborn, but when the King needed help in impressing the British delegation, Anna made him and the rest of the royal court seem less "barbaric" and more western. The two built a very strong and loving relationship and learned a lot from each other, just by keeping an open-mind when meshing their cultures together.

*The King and I* primarily tells this story from Anna Leonowens' point of view, because it was based off her memoirs. This work became very controversial in Thailand because it showed their King in a negative light. When the film version of *The King and I* in 1956, the Thai government banned the films in Thailand due to their historical inaccuracies and what the Thai called "lese-majesty". In 1948, two Siamese intellectuals "corrected" what they had seen in these works and sent the manuscript they had written to the American politician and diplomat Abbot Low Moffat. Moffat then used parts of the manuscript for his 1961 biography, *Mongkut the King of Siam*.

Although this work caused some controversy, it teaches its audience some lessons about keeping an open mind and being accepting of other cultures. In addition to that, the music and the overall production is something that everyone will enjoy.

Erin Duvinski

Everything is not what it seems. When my family went to see *The King And I*, we expected it to be like the movie. It was not our favorite movie. Sure it was a classic, but not all classics are good, especially for the younger generations. Classics seem to lose something to along the way.

So there I was, sitting in the theatre, wondering what to write about. The theater got dark and quiet. I was expecting to almost fall asleep. But the exact opposite happened. Within five minutes, everyone seemed hooked. I was leaning forward in my seat, glued to the stage. I do take a quick glance every once in a while at the audience. Everyone is still. NO one is sleeping. Not one little child was crying or restless.

The musical was something everyone could enjoy. It was funny, creative, brilliant. The director, Marc Robin, did a fantastic job. It is very well done. One of the best I have ever seen. It was much better than the movie.

My mother and younger sister were in the car. We were talking about the musical. We were so shocked how great it was. We still talk about it and laugh about it today. As we were driving home, my question was no longer, “What do I write about?” but, “What don’t I write about?” We all agreed that some classics remain relevant across generations.

Alicia Darcy

Believe it or not, children and young teens have been involved in professional theatre as far back as the medieval times! Before women were even accepted into professional theatre, young boys, or “boy players” were cast to play women because they possessed prepubescent voices that sounded most like a woman’s voice. Also, they performed in special “children companies” that had only boys as the cast members. Until the restoration of theatre in 1661, women were not able to perform in professional acting, opening the opportunities up for female children to join theatre as well.

In *The King and I*, child actors are a main asset of the entire play! Anna, one of the lead roles, has a young son, Louis, who is a very big part of the play. He, along with many other children, portrays a vital role in the musical. One scene that was exceptionally adorable was a scene in the King’s palace. As in the customs of Thailand, anyone who enters in front of the King must bow before him. During this scene, many young children would come into the room and bow before him, generally making mistakes that normal little toddlers would do: running into the room, giving him a hug, hugging Anna first, or forgetting how to bow. It was a wonder to me how professional these children acted on stage and remembered their lines and blocking. The *Walnut Street Theatre*’s production of *The King and I* takes child acting to a whole new level by including so many young and talented children in their show.

Many well known “classic” plays have child stars as their lead roles. *Oliver!* is a musical about a young orphan as the main character. Some other plays that are currently on Broadway and include children are *Mary Poppins*, and *The Lion King*. Being involved in theatre can be a great experience for children, as it gives them the opportunity to be involved in the arts at a very young age. The on going craze is only beginning, and many expect to see children show up more in professional theatre.

Abigail Fredette

In one scene in *The King and I*, Prince Chulalongkorn (Noah Breymeier) asks his father, the King of Siam (Mel Sagrado Maghuyop) how “grown-ups” know everything. The King is surprised by this question, realizing that he is not all-knowing, even though he is the King. Trying to hide his confusion, he assures his puzzled son that when he inherits the throne, he will indeed know everything. Prince Chulalongkorn, though still unsatisfied, walks offstage and leaves the king to his thoughts. Following this scene is the soliloquy “A Puzzlement,” in which the King of Siam expresses his realization that people who act like they know everything actually don’t. He also wonders how someone can be sure of something, while someone else can be sure of the opposite.

Mel Sagrado Maghuyop did an excellent job in portraying the King’s feelings toward this situation. He showed the audience the King of Siam’s true confusion, yet still masked it with his fake know-it-all “wisdom.” He made it obvious that the king was struggling with himself and trying to seem strong in front of his son, indirectly showing the King’s challenged character. Throughout the whole performance, the King of Siam himself is attempting to understand the concept of “scientific” human behavior, but just can’t put his finger on it. However, he still needs to pretend that he is intelligent in front of his wives, children, and especially the English school teacher, Anna Leonowens (Rachel York). Mel Sagrado Maghuyop made the King’s thoughts and feelings clear to the viewers, rendering the King of Siam as a lovable yet amusing individual.

Although the King’s mental arguments appear humorous when observed from the spectator’s point of view, these struggles are real life trials that everyone faces. The only difference is that the King of Siam’s are more obvious and outspoken. That is one of the reasons that *The King and I* is such an excellent musical: the audience can relate their life experiences to it.

Masyann Gensler

A long time classic, *The King and I* presents many challenges to the people willing to put on the show. Going into the theatre, I hummed a few bars of “Getting to Know You” and took my seat wondering how Rachel York would compare to my childish, animated version of the strong, beautiful Anna. However, I was not expecting to have grown up so much in the last ten years. Anna was not just this strong and beautiful woman; she was an object in a man’s world trying to give herself and her family a name. She was a symbol of everything women have tried to accomplish in recent history. The King was not just a funny man who did not understand “normal” life; he was a man who seriously misunderstood the proper treatment of other human beings and a disrespectful ruler. However Rodgers and Hammerstein intended to add comic relief to that character, he still has a dehumanizing aspect to him. Although Anna and the King were the first interpretations to change in my mind, the one that struck me most was the brutal murder of Tuptim. This part was always graciously omitted from my childhood Warner Brothers version of *The King and I*. Even scenes after hearing the deafening cries of this woman, I was enraged at the romanticism left in the audiences mind. “She dies in the name of love. That is goodness,” my friend said. I was not able to fathom this considered respectable, let alone common practice, even in the name of love. I left the show thinking about these characters, figures of adoration and pleasure in my youth, now corrupted by the society in which I live. The cries of Tuptim still stay with me and so does a slight resentment for such a melancholy show romanticized by the public.

Abby Bartlett

Gender inequality is a huge issue in our world. In many countries, women are seen as nothing, merely property to own. This problem is addressed discreetly throughout *The King and I*. For instance, Miss Anna comes to Siam, to teach the wives and children of the king. Because of her education, the wives call her “sir”, assuming that she is a man. Outrageous as it may seem in *The King and I*, it is not far-fetched from most societies today. In cultures such as Iran, Egypt, Israel, and Lebanon, women are considered minors and under the authority of male family members. In Saudi Arabia, women are not permitted to drive. This while absurd to us, is perfectly normal in other nations. America too has had its shares of discrimination. Until 1920, women were not allowed to vote, and even today, our “equal” society has been proven to remain discriminative.

*The King and I* also surprised me with the way the people treated their women. When women disobeyed, they were brutally beaten. It opens eyes to the differences in what is acceptable between different cultures. In our culture, women are not seen as something to give, but in *The King and I* a girl is given as a present to the king. Even the king’s many wives received a low level of respect! Women in areas like China and India are denied their rights even before they are born. In these places, abortion has caused the number of female births to drop immensely.

Perhaps, *The King and I* was written to open the eyes of people who are oblivious to this unfairness, inspire people all around the world to make the change, and teach people that equality is moral and right. The discrimination in *The King and I* may have seemed small, but it leaves a strong impact and lasting impression. *The King and I* teaches the valuable lesson that all life is precious, whether it’s the king, the school teacher, and yes- even the women.

Pilar Lugo

Based on the 1944 novel *Anna and the King of Siam*, *The King and I* is a classic when it comes to theatre and stage musicals. In *Anna and the King of Siam*, Margaret Landon writes the experiences of Anna Leonowens, a British schoolteacher who is hired as part of the King Mongkut's plan to modernize his country in the early 1860s, while still trying to hold on to old traditions. Since the March 29<sup>th</sup> of 1951, when the musical first premiered (at Broadway's St. James Theatre), *The King and I* has been extremely popular and well recognized in theatre. So you could imagine what a huge deal it is that the Walnut Street theatre is doing it.

When I went to The Walnut to see the play myself, besides the extraordinary talent of the actors, and the regal set, one thing in particular caught my eye: the costumes. The costumes were fantastically made by **Colleen Grady**, and you could see the effort taken to put the amount of detail in it as they did. In the 1860s, a British woman's attire consisted of bell-shaped skirts, corsets, an ankle-length chemise-like skirt, and layers of flounced petticoats that were worn under the gowns, and relied heavily on hoops and crinoline to make the extravagant size of the skirt portion of the gowns. In *The King and I*, you can see that this was appraised as every one of Anna's outfits in the musical fit into this description perfectly. Each of Anna's outfits contained patterns like liberty prints and horizontal zigzags, all on heavy silk in colors to that of the variety in Aniline dyes available at the time.

In Bangkok, everyone usually dresses conservatively, never showing their shoulders, cleavage, or even wear shorts! But in *The King and I*, the outfits for royal family were ornate with detailed beading and used exposed shoulder as a means to possibly decipher each person in their hierarchy in the kingdom. For example, all the wives wore long, flowing dresses made of satin or silk in pink and blue pastels or deep olives and rich golds with detailed beading. The first wife wore a sarong with one exposed shoulder, while the secondary wives wore a long dress with both shoulders covered. I raise a question though, regarding the outfits: why is it that historically speaking, Grady followed the trends in fashion for Anna to a T but for the royalty in Bangkok, it was a different story? I believe that perhaps the outfits were done this way for the sake of giving more depth, fashion wise, to those who live in Bangkok. Either way, they're great!

Skye Pagon

The most magical thing about a good show is the alternate reality it creates. We go to the theatre and are absorbed in the voices and the dancing lights and spiraling swirls of costumes. Everything little detail enhances the experience of the audience, from the color schemes to the fabrics used in the set. And it's these little details that make the difference between an outstanding show and a good, but not particularly memorable one.

The thing that many people forget when going to the theatre is that it isn't all about the acting. The costumes, the set, the lighting, the makeup- everything contributes to the mood the show is trying to cast. A subtle change in light, or the adding of wrinkles to an actor's face can completely change the way the audience views things.

For example, in *The King and I*, there is a famous dance scene, where the love story really starts to blossom. It's a romantic moment, and this is enhanced by the clever placement of a golden ball gown. In almost every fairy tale, the heroine goes to a ball wearing- wait for it- a dress of pure gold! The fact that the lady of *The King and I* is wearing a golden dress invokes the subtle suggestion of a fairy tale, which exactly compliments what the scene is about.

It is in these little hints and minute details that much of the mood of the show is carried. They give the audience reference points and help to clarify and exaggerate what the actors are portraying. If a golden dress stands as a reminder of Cinderella, the mind immediately draws a parallel to the romance of Anna and the King, and the show gains another, more tangible, dimension.

Connor Burke

In the show, “The King and I”, now playing at the Walnut Street Theater, an English woman named Ana is working for the King of Siam as a governess to his children. When the servants hear that British dignitaries are coming to check up on Ana, they decide to put on a ballet version of “Uncle Tom’s Cabin”, which takes up most of the second act. It is interesting to see how the culture from another country depicts ideas and themes that Americans would depict differently.

In the musical, the ballet does not touch upon the greatest theme of the book, which was racism. The ballet version just says that the characters Uncle Tom and Eliza are servants in a king’s palace, whereas in the original book they were slaves in southern America. The King’s servants, which were the ones who put on the ballet, were probably unaware of the racism between blacks and whites that was occurring on the other side of the world when they put on their show. That shows how the world, even today, interprets things quite differently because not the entire story is known in some parts of the world.

Jordyn Giannone

Imagine sitting in the Walnut Street Theatre. The curtain rises, and the fantastic current production, “The King and I,” begins. Unfortunately, it’s impossible to enjoy the show because of the audience. Effortless singing becomes masked by the rustle of unwrapping candy bars, and the view of the breathtaking set is obstructed by a stretching man a few rows ahead. As unfortunate as it sounds, many audience members have recently had to endure such rudeness. Theater as a pastime was once revered, seen as a privilege for only the upper class. People could not wait to go to the theater, enjoying a show while also priding themselves on their grandiose status. But in the past few years, theater has seemed to lose its valued standing. Trading suits and dresses for sweatpants, some theatergoers bring young toddlers and make a run for the bathroom during the finale of the first act. Of course, phones are one of the most common complaints. The polling and consulting firm, Wirthlin Worldwide, did a recent study, proving 43% of people don’t turn off their cell phones during a show. Speaking from personal experience, this selfish behavior can ruin a fabulous production and night out for any theatergoer. Is the theater not sacred anymore? People need to realize that the theater still has a huge influence and benefit on current society and culture. Hopefully visitors of the Walnut Street Theatre realize they are not only seeing a show, but also stepping inside a national historic landmark. This building is a perfect representation of all that theater still has to offer; it combines a commitment to both expression in the performing arts and preservation of rich theatrical and architectural history. Keep this in mind when visiting a theater next time. Don’t be afraid to enjoy the show, and stay courteous to others who are trying to do the same.

Gabbi Hanes

Remember when English women wore those funny looking hoop skirts and your head couldn't be higher than the King's? How about when 67 kids counted as "starting late" and so on (or as the King would say, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera!). *The King and I* is a Rogers and Hammerstein musical based of the book *Anna and the King of Siam*. It is about an English schoolteacher, Anna who travels with her son, Louis to Siam to teach all of the king's children and wives English. While she is there, she learns that Siam has many different traditions and beliefs, some that bring her to clash with the king, but ultimately, they grow to respect each other and their separate beliefs. The show doesn't only highlight the cultural differences between 1862 and now, but it also highlights the differences between the east (Siam) and the west (Great Britain). When Anna first arrives to Siam and meets all of the King's wives, all of the wives keep giggling at her. Lady Thiang tells her that it is because of her hoop skirt below her dress. Even though it was proper for an English lady to wear the big skirt, the ladies of Siam had never seen this kind of dress and thought that her dress was like that because she was shaped like that. Also, I'm pretty that if you saw someone walking down the street with a hoop skirt, you'd think it was pretty strange. One of the things that makes *The King and I* so enjoyable is that it really shows how different then and now are but it's not like a boring history class. The show has a very funny take on all of the matters in the show. If I was President Lincoln, I'd be pretty surprised when the King of Siam sent me some elephants to help me in the war. So, if you're in the mood to see some funny skirts and a king rolling around on the floor, *The King and I* is the show for you!

Paro Sen

We've all seen it – the archetype of a free-spirited woman who exists for the purposes of showing other characters how to live life to the fullest. This trope, dubbed the Manic Pixie Dream Girl by film critic Nathan Rabin, appears across literature, television, and theatre. Rodgers and Hammerstein's familiar musical, *The Sound of Music*, features the governess Maria, a classic example of the trope. Maria's infectious blitheness eventually manages to influence not only the children she cares for, but also the austere Captain von Trapp himself, while remaining a wholly selfless individual.

This archetype initially seems to make reappearance in another Rodgers and Hammerstein musical, *The King and I*. Currently playing at the Walnut Street Theatre, the musical follows Anna (Rachel York), a sprightly British governess employed by the brooding king of Siam (Mel Sagrado Maghuyop) to tutor his children. Though the musical is rife with subplots, Anna ultimately wins the love of all she meets in Siam – even the king, who undergoes massive personality changes thanks to Anna.

However, the character of Anna herself achieves a depth not seen in other Manic Pixies such as Maria, and in this, the trope is subverted. Anna has numerous internal conflicts, and outright refuses to exist solely for the benefit of the king, which comprises one of the problems Anna faces when not fulfilling the Maria-esque role of upbeat teacher and advisor. While Captain von Trapp, undergoes a complete metamorphosis in *The Sound of Music*, in *The King and I*, the king of Siam's rigid pride does not allow him to necessarily embrace or admit the impacts Anna makes on his personality quite so readily, giving him a greater sense of believability as a character on stage.

While elements of the Manic Pixie Dream Girl trope so visible in *The Sound of Music* are certainly felt in *The King and I*, the important thing to note is that they remain unexaggerated, defeating the archetype, and this is preserved faithfully by the Walnut Street Theatre's production of the musical.

Genevieve Naklicki

“The King and I” currently playing at the Walnut Street Theatre is a beautiful show that is loved all over the world. With the touching story and wonderful music and lyrics by Richard Rogers and Oscar Hammerstein II, who wouldn’t love this show? How about the inhabitants of the former Siam currently known as Thailand? Most people do not take in consideration that “The King and I” presents the Siamese monarchs as fools and hints at the opinion that the Thai culture is inferior to Western culture. It also held historical inaccuracies, for example, the main character, King Mongkut, was a deeply religious man. He spent most of his life in the monkhood and is now known in Thailand as the “Father of Thai Students.”

The first adaptation of the story, a dramatic movie, “Anna and the King”, was presented to the National Film Board and special branch police in Thailand who, after viewing the film, declared it illegal for portraying the Thai monarchy in a disrespectful way.

This seems to be such a beautiful, wonderful, and heartwarming musical for most viewers, yet in another culture it is disrespectful and hated. It is amazing how a show can appeal one way to some people and completely opposite to others. While there are many historical inaccuracies, and the people in Thailand do not approve of it, most people are extremely pleased with the story and music involved. The Walnut Street Theatre’s production of “The King and I” is wonderful and an excellent interpretation of this lovely musical. Putting aside Thai opinions of the musical, this is a wonderful show you do not want to miss.

Adrienne Rube

The greatest partnership that American musical theatre has ever known is dead. Such an event would seem to be a tragedy for theatergoers everywhere – so how is it that Philadelphia’s Walnut Street Theatre is having a celebration? Perhaps the merriment comes from their production of *The King and I*, which gives yet another life to the distinguished work of the dynamic duo whose lives may have ended, but whose music is far from dead - composer Richard Rodgers and lyricist Oscar Hammerstein III.

Rodgers and Hammerstein are credited as the pioneers of the modern musical theatre genre itself, being virtually the first of their kind to incorporate the elements of comedy, character development, song and dance into the plots of the shows they created. A closer look at their many collaborations yields interesting results about these components of the Rodgers and Hammerstein “formula musical.”

In the 1940’s and 50’s, it was customary for a musical to be centered around a single star performer in the likes of Fred Astaire. However, Rodgers and Hammerstein changed all that with their first musical collaboration, *Oklahoma!*, by choosing actors and actresses who were not well-known. The two also deliberately chose to incorporate the songs they wrote into the storyline of their shows, rather than create songs to be used as diversions from the play’s action, as was typically done at the time. Another groundbreaking phenomenon from *Oklahoma!* was the 15-minute extended ballet used as the first act finale (comparable to the remarkable ballet production in *The King and I*), which placed an unprecedented amount of influence on a musical’s choreography.

This emphasis on storytelling, dance, clever lyrics, and song integration had never before been seen on Broadway. *The King and I* is certainly no exception. In fact, it bears remarkable resemblance to the musical that marked the final collaboration of the beloved duo, *The Sound of Music*. Some argue that these commonalities, such as the similar character types and overarching themes of both shows, are what make Rodgers’ and Hammerstein’s musicals so predictable. I, however, argue that Rodgers and Hammerstein were anything but predictable – two innovative partners in musical crime who broke the rules and gave Broadway a run for its money.

Mary McLaughlin

“What does a fish know about the water in which it swims all its life?” When Albert Einstein posed this question, applying its message to a musical was probably not his original intention. However, a year after his death in 1955, Rogers and Hammerstein’s *The King and I* provided perfect personifications of Einstein’s metaphorical “fish.”

As humans, we are often unaware of our own inbred biases, and are consequently unable to look past them unless expertly guided to a new way of thinking or behaving. In *The King and I*, the King of Siam, his wives, and his children are all drowning in a sea of tradition that they will never perceive as inhibiting until liberated by Anna, who is unused to their “water.”

The king, following the example of his ancestors, sees no problem with the objectification of women. Though modern nations perceive his actions as immoral and barbaric, the king continues to treat his multiple wives as servants and property. Not until Anna challenges him does he question his long-held prejudices.

The royal wives are also unaware of the discrimination they are subjected to. Knowing only what they have experienced, most of the women contently bow to their husband, believe him infallible, and obey his commands. They are quickly baffled by Anna’s assertive behavior, believing her to be bold and improper.

Finally, the king’s children are uninformed of a world outside their own. When Anna teaches them about snow, the children protest, refusing to believe her. Since they have neither felt nor seen snow before, they will not accept its existence. They are also convinced that Siam is the largest country in the world, regardless of what an accurate map illustrates.

As Einstein alluded, every member of the royal family is unaware of the “water” in which they live. Old traditions are accepted blindly and, once solidified in one way of life, the people of Siam are resistant to change. Before Anna moved into their habitat, the “fish” of Siam were content to swim in the isolated and confining waters of their nation, unaware of the progress of the outside world.

Margot Field

As Anna and her son make their first appearance in Rogers and Hammerstein's *The King and I*, they're blown away by the beauty of Siam. Maybe it's just convincing acting, but gazing at the brilliantly ornate stage at the Walnut Street Theater, the audience has a similar reaction. Surrounded by a sea of deep indigos and burnt oranges, it's easy to forget about the Philadelphia winter rapidly approaching.

While the idea of designing the set for such an iconic musical may sound daunting to some, *The King and I's* Set Designer Robert Kovach had something invaluable to the process: firsthand experience.

Two years ago Kovach traveled to Thailand and had the opportunity to go beyond Bangkok and explore temples of the less developed northern region.

"You could see what they actually looked like," Kovach said.

Kovach took this experience and used it as the main inspiration for the designs for the Walnut's production. He tried to create as authentic a set as possible. What resulted is an extremely intricate design, complete with a moving pagoda and a cleverly planned back drop that changes to fit the mood of the scene. Massive columns line the stage and elephants are on everything from the burgundy curtains to the rich blue floor.

"You have so much freedom" Kovach said, "You can make it as ornate as you want to go".

As ornate as the design is, the transitions go virtually unnoticed.

"The director wanted the most seamless show ever," Kovach said, "We wanted everything to be as cohesive and tight as possible.

This proved to be challenging, although in the end, successful. The stage easily transforms from palace classroom to exotic jungle without the audience thinking twice. *The King and I* tells the classic story of a headstrong governess in foreign land. With the help of a carefully planned set design it manages to do all but buy you a plane ticket.

Christine Palazzolo

Oscar Hammerstein II, once noted to his partner, Richard Rodgers, on behalf of their musical, *The King and I*, that this, “will remain ‘modern’ long after any of our plays.”

*The King and I* is a work not indistinguishable, with having thousands of productions run since its initial opening in 1951. Popularity of distinctly diverse audiences concludes that Hammerstein was correct in his statement. Still, the essential question surrounding the originality of *The King*'s content is “what makes the show modern”? Although one could argue that the presence of such young actors such as Clarisse Surja or Isabella Le bowing before the King of Siam is a whimsical refreshment to commonly mature dominated theatrics, it is not the initial source of appeal. *The King and I* is a reoccurring successful archetypal show piece because of the characters' language.

The character that stands out as receiving a prevalent response from the audience during the show is the previously mentioned King of Siam, played by Mel Sagrado Maghuyop. Maghuyop fabricates a connection with the audience. As Maghuyop's imitations of Rachel York's character, Anna Leonowens, become seemingly more accurate, the response retaliates successfully. The repetition and mockery of York's British diction sends Maghuyop into a free for all exclaiming the overplayed “etc. etc”. Such a frivolous script between the two relieves the audience of deeper unveiling topics of politics, gender equality, and especially love.

The modernization within *The King and I* is not as similarly depicted as would other shows reflecting parallel concepts. The success of *King and I* has come through its wordplay of one of the leading roles. Sixty years of production has proved that even just the script of a work can last time even as its history does not.

Rachel Jacobs

*The King and I* is a show that keeps you at the edge of your seat. It takes place in a culture and time so different than ours, so we never know what'll go on. At any point, something shocking could happen. It's a fictional show, correct?

In actuality, the show is not as fictional as it appears. A show seemingly surreal is surprisingly based on historical events. King Mongkut ruled over Siam, nowadays known as Thailand, in 1861 at the age of 57. He requested that a British woman come to be a governess for his royal children. The woman chosen was Anna Leonowens, a Eurasian mother, who was working in the British colony of the city-state of Singapore. Once sought upon, she boarded the *Chao Prya*, which was commanded by Captain Orton, and headed to Siam. In *The King and I*, the King, who remains unnamed, seeks assistance from a British woman, Anna Leonowens, to watch and teach his royal children and his wives in 1862. Anna Leonowens, in the show, is a widowed schoolteacher.

The show has a lot more articulations that aren't found in the story. But, even though most do not believe the story of Anna and the King, it was adapted from the historical events that took place between King Mongkut and Anna Leonowens in Siam circa 1861.

Amataverna Lee

The King and I is a light hearted musical filled with laughter, dance, and adorable little children. However, what really makes the musical shine is the king. In the Walnut Street Theatre's production of the King and I, Mel Sagrado Maghuyup, plays the king. Through his acting you see an arrogant king whom is so unnaturally ignorant to his surroundings and world outside his kingdom that it is quite funny. The king's superior air and determination to be on top of everyone is funny to watch because no one would act like that in real life. That is part of what makes this musical nearly a comedy. The king's obliviousness to everything else is not accepted by society, but yet we can see it happen. When the governess Anna demands the house she was promised, the king just brushes it aside repeatedly until in the end he gives in. Although the king can be very ignorant, he learns to break away from that attitude a bit. The King and I tells the story of the British governess Anna in a foreign culture, but it also tells the story of an arrogant king that learns to look beyond himself.

It was not easy for him. Part of the reason that it was hard for him to adjust was because he did not like being wrong. There is a scene in the play where the king was going to whip a woman for trying to run away and Anna tells him not to. He was going to, but in the end decides against it and leaves. Also, he tries to answer his son's questions, but he himself wasn't sure of the answers. There's actually an amusing song about it that reveals more depth to the king than the surface.

Overall, the King and I is a wonderful play. The king is a big attribute to that- his stubborn personality that people would usually disapprove of and hate shines as a source of laughter on stage.

Ella Tomko

Many kids (and adults!) can attest to dreaming to be famous actors or dancers when you grow up, I know I am one of them. In the Walnut Street Theaters production of Rodgers and Hammerstein's "The *King and I*", many local girls had their dreams come true. These girls portray the many daughters of the King of Siam, who are being taught by the young English widow Anna.

While I was waiting for the final rehearsal to start, I was scanning the audience in the mezzanine my eye caught an entire row of little girls with neat little buns on top of their heads. Their ages seemed to range from four-years-old to twelve-years-old. So I walked over and introduced myself, I told them I would like to interview them. All of their faces lighted up. I talked to the youngest girls first, Ella and Rachel who were around the age of six. When I asked them their favorite part of performing on stage they did a simultaneous twirl and said, "DANCING!" Their friends started giggling, as I moved down the row I came across the two oldest. Jenna and Marielle are eighth graders; they were probably the most professional eighth graders I have ever met. They answered all my questions with such ease and in collected thoughts. They were extremely professional when I asked about their friends outside of theater and if they thought it was difficult keeping in touch when they are working from 3:00 to 12 at night. They said "They [our friends] understand that we love to do this [acting], and they text us all the time and wishing us luck and sometimes givr us the homework". They both said they wanted to continue with theater when they go to high school next year. I was cut off by the fading house lights but, when the big dance numbers came onstage, I enjoyed watching the little girls dance along with their fellow cast members in their seats. Seeing the passion in their faces was both inspiring and reassuring. The love of theater continues.

Kelly White

From Anna's spectacular ball gown to the king's sparkling coat, the costumes of "The King and I" bring this grand production to life.

I once worked on the costume crew for my high school's production of "It's a Wonderful Life." I remember the experience as a big blur of jammed zippers, missing bowties and shredded angel wings. It was my job to keep the angel wings in good condition; a task at which I failed miserably. I remember it as being very rewarding but also quite stressful. So, as I watched the Walnut Street Theater's production of "The King and I," I was fascinated by the costumes, partly because of their immense beauty but also because of a troubling thought brewing in my brain. If I had found the costuming duties for an amateur, high school show to be difficult, what challenges went into costuming a professional production?

Enter Colleen Grady, the costume designer, for "The King and I" to help me in my quest.

Q: The King and I is such an iconic show. Did you feel pressure to draw inspiration from the 1956 movie or numerous Broadway productions?

A: *I certainly watched the movie and did draw some inspiration from it. I also drew inspiration from the movie "Anna and the King." Inspiration also came from historical research of the time period. I also did much research about Thai (what was then Siam) dance style and costume, especially for the "ballet".*

Q: How closely did you work with the set designers in designing the costumes?

A: *I worked very closely with the set and lighting designers to ensure that all of our color schemes worked well together and allowed for the actors to fit in with, as well as "pop" from the scenery.*

Many things go into making a show great, and the carefully researched, designed and constructed costumes of "The King and I" make this production a sight to behold. The costumes of "The King and I" do more than "pop". They bring the show to another level, and transport the audience to 1860's Siam.

Emily Falcone

The topic of imperialism is that it is part of world history and is often portrayed in many of our historical works of literature. The Walnut Street Theatre's production of *The King and I* is a wonderful example of the portrayal of history, based on a true story that focuses on imperialistic times. Much of the show's plot is centered on the effects of British imperialism and their westernization of the Eastern worlds. The king of Siam, in attempts to teach his children to be better, sends for an English school teacher. It is his belief that they must be taught English and become what is considered to be acceptable by western societies. The king faces a challenge with the British government, when they say they are dropping in for a visit. At this time in history Great Britain was looking for territory and what lands would be the best and the easiest to obtain. They were looking for what they called "barbarians"—people who did not live in a civilization like their own. The King feels the need to learn how to be more like the British, and the only way to save his country and keep himself in control of it is to westernize both himself and his palace. This both works in his favor, and against it. He does not entirely succeed in being more westernized, but he does find a way to have the English see him as fit to run his country. His need to adjust his lifestyle was one that was motivated entirely by the imperialistic society he lived in. This is something interesting to watch from today's standpoint, almost as if you know the ending simply, by living in the future in a way. These works of literature that have an audience thrown back into another time, are ones that should be greatly valued for what they can teach.

Katie White

*The King and I* tells a tale of the collision of two worlds as the main character Anna makes the transition from Great Britain to King Mongkut's palace in Siam. There are unmistakable cultural differences between the two places, most of which (like slavery and treatment of women) are hard-hitting and serious. However, the clashing of cultures also plays a large role in the development of the show's humor. The best instance of this is the contrast of clothing and the culture surrounding one's way of dress.

When Anna first arrives to the palace, she shocks the wives by wearing a hoop skirt which, although a common fashion in Europe, looks odd next to the Siamese slim-silhouetted dresses. Having never seen anything like it before, the women gasp and crowd around Anna's skirt, looking at each other in confusion; they think that Anna's body is actually bell-shaped like her skirt! Later in the show, the king is expecting a visit from a Sir Edward Ramsey of Great Britain. In an attempt to impress him and prove that his people are civilized, the king decides to make his wives look more western. Anna fashions oversized, flashy outfits with hoops for them to wear. However, they come as a source of trouble for the women: the skirts flip up when they bow, and during the visit they get frightened by Ramsey's monocle and throw their skirts over their heads while screaming.

*The King and I* not only sheds light on injustices that took place in Siam in the 1860's, but manages to bring out the silliness in cultural differences as well. In doing so, the writers were able to balance presenting a serious message and making the audience laugh, which marks true writing genius and makes for an awesome show.

Nicole Liebeknecht

Hammerstein once said, "It [*The King and I*] has more wisdom as well as heart than any other musical play by anybody." Does this wisdom and heart emerge from the main female character Anna? The character Anna represents a woman fighting for her rights in society dominated by males. However, for Rodgers and Hammerstein productions, she is not the first of her kind.

Beginning with one of their early works *Oklahoma!*, the main girl Laurey controls the action of the show as Curly the cowboy and Jud the farmer compete for her affection. She controls their emotions as she easily makes Curly jealous by bringing Jud to the dance. This results in brawl between the two men from which Curly is victorious and Jud falls on his own blade to his death. *South Pacific* is another example of a show with a strong female character. The story revolves around the struggle with deep-seeded racism and interracial marriage. Nellie, a youthful Navy nurse puts her foot down to succumbing to Emile, the French plantation owner, and his charm by singing "I'm Gonna Wash That Man Right Outta My Hair".

Anna's character is probably most similar to Maria's in Rogers and Hammerstein's *The Sound of Music*. Maria must also possess the courage to stand up to an authoritative male figure. Similarly, Maria is an educator to Captain von Trapp's seven children, just as Anna is a teacher to the King of Siam's many children and wives. The focal males are confused about the women's ways of teaching but at the same time are awe struck. In the end, both Anna and Maria learn to love their respectful man while maintaining their strong position as a female in a male dominated civilization.

Eli Schleicher

How easy is it to get confused? *C'est facile, non?* All I had to do was ask one question in French and you probably got lost. But when we do get perplexed, what do all teachers instruct us to do? Ask. It's as easy as a simple question. But in Walnut Street Theatre's production of *The King and I*, there are a few characters that haven't quite gotten the message, particularly the King himself. He just can't come to terms with his own puzzlements. But maybe there was a greater purpose for this mixed-up monarch in denial.

The King of Siam encounters quite a few dilemmas once Anna begins working for him. He's obviously a little confused with exactly what to do with her unusually forceful attitude, to the extent that he has to sing a whole song about it. And yet he refuses to admit to anyone that he has no idea how to handle her. On an even bigger scale, when Britain threatens to make Siam into a protectorate, nearly every person in the King's court can see that he's clueless. But no, Anna has to come to him, because he won't confess his confusion. And yet Anna offers her help anyway, and lo and behold she has a brilliant solution.

But why create this stubborn sovereign? This character that needs someone to come to his aid, but refuses to admit his own problems.? Perhaps it relates to the legacy of the writers themselves, Rodgers and Hammerstein. The duo is known to have reinvented the genre of musical theatre. Where shows used to be whimsical and based around the celebrities of the time, these two wrote shows that were thought-provoking and grounded in the characters, not the actors playing them. But how to convince the theatre community that their shows and writers needed help or a push in a new direction? Why not write that exact community into one of their shows, to show people that it's okay to ask for help. The King wasn't just confused, he was helping to change the face of musical theatre.

Malorie Murray

The Walnut Street Theatre production of *The King and I* is as flawlessly professional as it gets; both romantic and humorous, returning director Marc Robin is responsible for the acting, singing, and dancing that is simply first-rate, professional and, fun. Through my eyes, however, it's all about the sets! After all, what stage is complete without color? Let me explain:

You see, we live in an HD-3D world, filled with amazing special effects and painfully real imagery. Entertainment is digitalized, fabulized, frenzied...etcetera, etcetera, etcetera.

And you, Walnut Street Theatre, expect to somehow magically transport us to Siam, an exotic and faraway land? But oh, we'll need spices and sailing ships...and sunsets. We are most certainly uncertain that this will qualify as entertainment without some hi-def special effects! Are we to be lured in by those beautifully painted ships in the harbor? The towering columns plastered with curious little figures? And what about the giant Buddhas and Boddhisatvas? They seem kind of.... really... fun. The trees, well they're pretty amazing too! They seem to just dance in place, having character and a mind of their own. But still one would presume such an elaborate set would not be complete without digital illustrations or three-dimensional holograms. Could it be the lack of such extravagancies is what makes this classic play so breathtakingly new?

As a society, we have become so fixated on creating three-dimensional televisions with high quality resolution that the luxury, as anything else, loses appeal; we become so accustomed to LED television, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera, that suddenly old *Charlie Brown* reruns leave our jaws dropping, quenching our thirst for a visual difference. Thirsty for a taste of the reality we seem to have drifted away from? Surely Robin's production of *The King and I* will leave you reminiscing about a time when every movie was not shown in IMAX 3D, a time when special effects didn't need to bring a set to life. Find a seat fast, because this one doesn't need red and blue glasses, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera!

