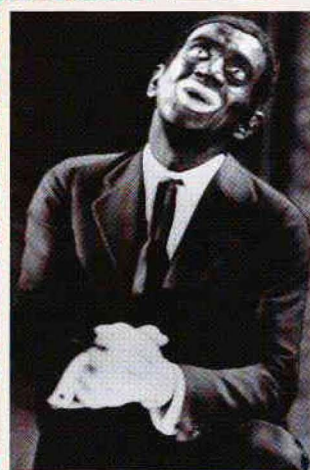




With a song in my heart: A new PBS doc covers (from left) *Hairspray*, Jolson, *Oklahoma!* and all points in between.



t e l e v i s i o n r e v i e w

Broadway bares all

PBS's six-hour documentary on the Great White Way is more than just another op'nin', another show **By Michael Giltz**

Broadway: The American Musical

Produced and directed by Michael Kantor ■ Written by Kantor and Laurence Maslon ■ PBS ■ October 19–21, 9 P.M.–11 P.M. Eastern (check local listings)

At six hours, the new PBS documentary *Broadway: The American Musical* is far too short. You realize this especially in the last hour, which tries to gallop through 1980–2004, with nods to the AIDS crisis, the showmanship of producer Cameron Mackintosh, the rise of corporate backers like Disney, the passing of Jonathan Larson, 9/11, the megasuccess of Andrew Lloyd Webber, *Wicked*, *Hairspray*, *La Cage aux Folles*, and a little show called *The Producers*.

Still, it's one of the most in-depth looks at Broadway ever attempted, and

cowriter-director-producer Michael Kantor dutifully covers the high points—if he doesn't speak to stars like Carol Channing, Harvey Fierstein, Ethel Merman, Nathan Lane, Stephen Sondheim, Fred Ebb, Al Jolson, Tommy Tune, Chita Rivera, Joel Grey, and countless others, you can be certain you'll see clips of them performing. Airing October 19–21, it's hosted by Julie Andrews (reason enough to tune in for some), and Kantor does a good job of showing how Broadway led and reflected popular culture from the Ziegfeld Follies through the early '70s.

That relevance fades away in the last two episodes, of course, since Broadway no longer churns out popular tunes that dominate the radio or stars who tower over the culture. Now hit songs come to Broadway via

ABBA's *Mamma Mia!* and Billy Joel's *Movin' Out*, while movie and TV stars pop in only for a visit.

Nothing here is revelatory, but *Broadway* gets the job done. If nothing else, its makers have certainly unearthed a treasure trove of footage. (One complaint: Kantor should have identified exactly what we're looking at, since it's not always clear—rehearsal footage? Opening night? A Tony Awards performance? A TV special? Who knows?) Still, anyone who cares about the Fabulous Invalid will be happy to hear that its songs (like "I Could Have Danced All Night") and its stories are as thrilling as ever. ■

Giltz is a regular contributor to several periodicals, including the New York Post.

FROM LEFT: PHOTOFEST; CULVER PICTURES; GION MILLI/GETTY IMAGES