



BOOKFILTER'S MARCH PICK OF THE MONTH

MICHAEL GILTZ | MARCH 7, 2019

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Every month, BookFilter picks the best new theater book, exclusively for Broadway Direct readers.

Funny Man: Mel Brooks

By Patrick McGilligan

\$40, Harper

Out March 19

In his heart of hearts, Mel Brooks has always been a Broadway baby. Doomed to a life of working in the garment industry, 9-year-old Brooks (then Melvin Kaminsky) went to his first Broadway show: *Anything Goes* starring Ethel Merman. He immediately said nuts to sewing and yes to a life in showbiz. What followed? Pretty much everything, from being taught how to drum by the legendary Buddy Rich to working the Borscht Belt circuit, from summer stock to his real big break in the new realm of live TV. That of course was Sid Caesar's legendary variety series *Your Show of Shows*. Mel Brooks was just one of a string of comedy legends in a writing room that also was home to Neil Simon and Carl Reiner. A Grammy-winning comedy album about the

2000 Year Old Man made Brooks famous in his own right. And that was followed by sitcoms (*Get Smart*), movies (*Blazing Saddles*), more sitcoms and more movies — and then pairing up with the love of his life, actress Anne Bancroft. No matter what Brooks did, the pizzazz of live theater and a goofy musical number were almost always in the mix. Brooks wrote the book to the 1962 musical *All American* and then finally conquered Broadway once and for all with the megasmash *The Producers*, based on his original film. Author Patrick McGilligan covers it all, including classic Brooks masterpieces such as *Young Frankenstein* (itself a Broadway musical and just revived in a new and improved, slimmed-down version). *Funny Man* is a substantial, serious look at a compulsively silly man who knew from an early age that when you're looking for a laugh, anything goes.

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