IRVING BERLIN'S

# White Christmas



NOV. 19–DEC. 27, 2026

COLORADO SPRINGS
Fine Arts Center
at COLORADO COLLEGE




# Before the Show

## Welcome!

Musicals offer an escape from reality and create a space where a character's inner conflicts and emotions become visible. They take the chaos of a complicated world and provide order, inviting audiences into the messiness of a character's hopes, dreams, despair, and, ultimately, triumph. People become enamored by their spectacle and sing their epic songs in the shower, in the car, or at karaoke night. Classic musicals, like *West Side Story, Les Misérables, The Sound of Music,* and *Cabaret,* range from romantic stories to historical dramas. Modern musicals, such as *Rent, In the Heights, Dear Evan Hansen, Waitress, Wicked,* and *Come From Away,* examine social issues that are more relevant to today's audiences, including gentrification, the AIDS crisis, identity, xenophobia, and self-advocacy. *Irving Berlin's White Christmas* harkens back to musicals like *West Side Story, Oklahoma,* and *The Sound of Music.*

A few reminders so you and others can fully enjoy the play!

- Please make sure you have completely turned off your cell phone, smartwatch, and any other device
- No photography or video recording of any kind is permitted. The setting, artwork, set pieces, and script are considered intellectual property.
- Please remain quiet during the play itself and save all conversations for the intermission or after the show. This is a live show, not a short TikTok video!

# About the Show

## Synopsis:

**Act One**:
Christmas Eve on the Western Front of World War II. The location is ambiguous. Captain Bob Wallace and Private First Class Phil Davis are putting on a holiday show to increase the morale of the American troops on the Western Front. Corporal Ralph Sheldrake is MCing the show as it winds down (“Happy Holiday”) when the commanding officer General Waverly interrupts. Telling the soldiers that he is proud of them, and they should enjoy the holidays, he also announces his retirement. Ten years later, the two showmen have perfected one of the best song-and-dance acts around. They appear on the *The Ed Sullivan Show* and set up another performance after their holiday vacation in Florida (“Happy Holiday/Let Yourself Go”). After the show ends, Phil comforts Bob to see the act of the two of a comrade that they served with in the army. And that maybe he can set Bob up with a girl (“Love and the Weather”). They both arrive for the Haynes sisters’ performance (“Sisters”). After the show, Bob and Phil are introduced to Betty and Judy Haynes. Phil and Judy hit it off and discuss what they are doing over the holidays as they leave to dance, with Phil learning that the sisters are taking the train up to Vermont (“The Best Things Happen While You’re Dancing”). Bob and Betty struggle to connect. Betty tells Bob that Judy wrote the letter asking them to come see their show. Bob is impressed about the angle that she's playing. They argue a bit. Witnessing their interactions, Phil and Judy come up with a plan to trick their partners into spending the holidays together in Vermont. They get on the train, and Phil tricks Bob into going to Vermont instead of Florida. They run into the sisters and Bob realizes he’s been tricked. He isn’t thrilled with the idea of going to Vermont and being in the snow, but he eventually agrees (“Snow”).

When the quartet arrives in Vermont, they realize that it's unseasonably warm and there's no actual snow. They check into the inn and find it's completely empty. The inn's manager, Martha, introduces them to the owner of the inn, who is Bob and Phil's old commanding officer, General Waverly. He in turn introduces them to his granddaughter Susan. After Susan and the general leave, Martha confides in the two men that there is a growing number of bills, and the inn is not in good financial shape. She's been managing but hasn't told the general of the financial issues (“What Can You Do With a General?”). Quickly, Bob and Phil decide to integrate The Haynes Sisters into their act and bring their show up to Vermont to give the inn some attention in the warm weather. Secretly though, the two men reach out to their old buddy Ralph Sheldrake in an attempt to get their old troops to show up and surprise the old general. As they are rehearsing, the four find out that Martha had a big singing career and was once a vaudeville performer, and she wants to return to the stage (“Let Me Sing and I’m Happy”)!

That night, Susan can’t sleep. After talking to Bob and singing (“Count Your Blessings (Instead of Sheep)”), Susan drifts off. Betty’s opinion of Bob improves, and they kiss. The following day, a coded message from Ralph Sheldrake comes in for Bob and Phil. Martha doesn't fully understand the message and thinks that the two are planning on taking the inn from the general. Martha tells Betty, who argues with Bob, and they miscommunicate with each other. Betty angrily leaves, and Bob is confused by the situation. As Act One comes to a close, the general discovers all the bills, and the financial reality of the situation falls upon him (“Blue Skies”).

## Act Two

Phil and Judy rehearse their duet (“I Love a Piano”), and Judy finds out after the rehearsal that Betty is planning on leaving the show and Vermont. Martha and Judy go after her. Instead of convincing her to stay, they congratulate her because of how the song-and-dance men are not trustworthy (“Falling Out of Love Can Be Fun”). Bob and Phil learn that the Haynes sisters can't do the routine, and no one in the chorus knows it. They rehearse it themselves (“Sisters” (reprise)). The group finds out from Susan that Betty has gone to New York City because Bob isn't the man she thought he was, and Judy drove her to the train station. The general convinces Bob to go to New York City because he knows that Betty is in love with him and he’s in love with her. Bob arrives at The Regency Room club right as Betty sings her big number (“Love, You Didn’t Do Right by Me/How Deep is the Ocean?”). After she gets off stage, Bob is there and they fight until Ralph Sheldrake appears and says Bob contacted him to catch Betty's show and that he can't believe that Bob and Phil are wanting to help the general out.

The following night Bob appears on the *The Ed Sullivan Show*, saying that the general could use some company this holiday. Given that some of them wouldn't be alive if not for General Henry Waverly, showing up for Christmas might just be the greatest gift they could give to the “greatest guy that they’ll ever know.” In the background, the song the 151st division used to sing to the general is playing (“The Old Man (Prelude)”). Bob returns to Vermont without Betty. Susan auditions for the show (“Let Me Sing and I’m Happy” (reprise)).

It’s Christmas Eve, the opening night of the show. The general is getting ready when he realizes the only suit he has in his closet is his old dress uniform. After arguing with Martha about sending his uniforms to the clearers, the general receives a letter from President Dwight D. Eisenhower allowing him to be reinstated. Betty shows up and is ready to participate in the show when she and Bob talk and she apologizes (“How Deep the Ocean?” (reprise)). Martha escorts the general to the stage where Bob, Phil, and Ralph are in dress uniform as well. They have all the old troops stand up and sing (“The Old Man”). The general greets them all, tells them how proud of them he is and comments on how they've grown. Before taking his seat, he explains that he doesn't want to be a general anymore, just an innkeeper. As the show begins, Bob sings (“White Christmas”), inviting those who know it to join along. Susan runs in and tells them that it's snowing (“I’ve Got My Love to Keep Me Warm”).

## Character Breakdowns:

- **Bob Wallace:** Singing star and one half of the Wallace and Davis duo. Served as a captain during World War II and was assigned to the 151st division in Europe under General Henry Waverly. Although he is a natural leader and handles the pressures of showbiz well, he isn't the best in social or romantic areas.
- **Phil Davis:** Served as private first class in the 151st division during World War II where he met Bob Wallace. He became a celebrity as the other half of the duo Wallace and Davis. He is a bit of a clown and a ladies' man who cares deeply for his friends.
- **Betty Haynes:** Responsible and sensible. Is half of the song-and-dance team The Haynes Sisters. Is a phenomenal singer.
- **Judy Haynes:** the more ambitious and younger of The Haynes Sisters duo. She often engages in various schemes to get things to go the way she wants.
- **General Henry Waverly:** Leader of the 151st division of the Western Front. A retired general who became an innkeeper in Vermont after the war ended and is attempting to adjust to retired life.
- **Susan Waverly:** The general's granddaughter. She's a loveable kid who tries to join show business when Wallace and Davis move their rehearsals and shows to her grandfather's inn.
- **Martha Watson:** Manager of the general's inn and once a vaudevillian star in her own right. She has a dry sense of humor.
- **Ralph Sheldrake:** Corporal in the 151st division during World War II and friend to Phil and Bob. He now works as an executive at *The Ed Sullivan Show.*
- **Rita and Rhoda:** Chorus girls in Bob and Phil's show. They are brash and fun, but sometimes not the smartest of entertainers.

## Key Themes:

- **Loyalty/Camaraderie:** The bonds that the characters formed during World War II show up a decade later when their old general is in trouble.
- **Generosity:** In the midst of people being greedy and wanting to get rich quick, the act of giving up a large amount of money to help their old commanding officer buy the inn helps to heal the characters.
- **Nostalgia:** The typical romantic feel of the holidays and a similar time.

## The World of the Play

- **Setting:** Beginning of the musical is set in 1944 around Christmas during World War II. The rest of the musical is set in 1954 in New York City and at a small inn in Vermont.

## Author:

- **Music and lyrics by Irving Berlin:** “Irving Berlin has no place in American Music. He *is* American Music” — Jerome Kern. Over his 101-year lifetime (1888 - 1989), Irving Berlin né Israel Beilin wrote over 1,500 (Berlin) songs, including “White Christmas” (Bing Crosby’s version is the bestselling single of all time, having sold over 50 million copies), “Anything You Can Do (I Can Do Better),” “There's No Business Like Show Business,” “Alexander’s Ragtime Band,” and “God Bless America.” He won the Academy Award for Best Original Song for “White Christmas” in the film *Holiday Inn.* The film version of *White Christmas* was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Original Song “Count Your Blessings (Instead of Sheep).”
- **Book by David Ives and Paul Blake:** playwrights and screenwriters who adapted the 1954 musical film of the same name, modernizing it, and adapting it to the current musical version.

## Lesson Plan

Warm Up (5 minutes)

- What does the word “home” mean to you? Especially around the holidays?
- What do you think life was like for soldiers coming home after World War II?

### Movie vs. Play (20-120 minutes)

Depending on available time, you might want to show the original 1954 film and have the students compare and contrast the two. At the very least, you should show a few clips, depending on the guidelines of your school/district.

- At the least, show the beginning and the finale plus one other musical number. A suggestion of some of the ones to check are below.

If short on time include the following clips:

- Opening
- General arriving / Ending
- My recommendation for music/dance number is either “Snow” or “Count Your Blessings (Instead of Sheep)” or “Sisters”
- For each of the videos, discuss any call backs or anything else in the film or how the music pushes out the emotion.

After either showing the whole film or the clips, have the students create a list of predictions about what will occur in the show. After the show, have them discuss if it was similar or different to what they expected.

### Scene Adaptation (30-50 minutes)

In pairs/groups, students try to adapt a scene from their favorite holiday film (please make sure it is school appropriate). This would be easiest if they choose a film without a musical number.

- Have them look up the scene online and write it out.
- At the part of the scene where the emotion is at the highest point, have the students write a musical number or a song for at least one character to sing. The song could be a pop song (jukebox musical style) that they rewrite the lyrics to or a completely new original song.
- Then they will need to think of the location and setting of the scene and draw the ground plan to pull the audience in.
- On the back of the paper, please have the students write an 8-10 sentence paragraph explaining their reasonings and choices.

## Preshow Questions

- Based on the title, what do you predict will happen in the show?
- Irving Berlin wrote “White Christmas,” which became one of the bestselling songs of all time. Why do you think certain holiday songs become classics that last generations?
- What is the difference between watching a movie musical and watching one on stage? What do you think changes?
- If you had to put together a show to save a struggling business, what would it be? Why?
- What would you expect a song-and-dance routine from this era to be like?
- Why do holidays often make people think more about home and family?
- Have you ever felt homesick or watched someone else feel that way? What helped?
- Have you ever helped someone because they helped you first? What happened?
- What do you think it means that the two lead characters go from being soldiers to being business partners?
- The story starts during World War II and then jumps to 1954—why do you think the writers chose to show both time periods?

## Post-show questions

- In your own words, summarize the plot of the show in 8-10 sentences.
- Why is General Waverly's inn struggling, and what do Bob and Phil do to help?
- What role does the weather (or lack of snow) play in the story's tension?
- How do Bob and Phil's personalities differ, and how does that create both conflict and comedy?
- Which musical number stood out to you the most and why?
- How did the songs help move the plot forward or reveal character emotions?
- If you were the director, is there a scene or number you would have staged differently?
- Did any part of the show remind you of a real relationship, tradition, or experience in your own life?
- Was the ending too neat/convenient, or did it feel earned? Why?

## Extension Activity

**Holiday Brochure activity**: Have students in different groups choose two countries, excluding the United States. Once they have chosen their two countries, have them design a holiday tourism brochure to present to their classmates. They are basically travel agents trying to sell why someone would visit their countries. They need to have the following information in their guides:

- What is the country?
- What are its holiday traditions?
- How the country/culture(s) celebrate or honor the traditions
- Why should their classmates travel to that country?
- At least one popular holiday song from the location

Have them present to the class on a designated day using the following rubric as their grading categories:

| | **Excellent (4)** | **Good (3)** | **Developing (2)** | **Beginning (1)** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Country overview | Clear, accurate, engaging intro to both countries (location, culture basics) | Accurate intro, less engaging | Basic/incomplete info on one or both countries | Missing/inaccurate |
| Holiday Traditions and how they are celebrated | Specific, well-researched traditions with detailed explanation of how the culture(s) celebrate/honor them | Traditions and explanation present, some detail missing | Vague or generic traditions/explanation | Traditions missing or incorrect |
| Sales Pitch | Compelling, specific reasons classmates should visit; genuinely sounds like a travel agent. | Solid reasons given, somewhat persuasive. | Reasons are generic. | No real persuasive attempt. |
| Holiday Music | Includes at least one relevant holiday song per country, with context on its significance | Includes song(s) but limited context | Song included with little/no explanation | Song missing |

Total _____

## Bibliography


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