



Spring 3-13-2000

## Curtain Goes Up in April IWU to Stage Moss Hart Farce "Once in a Lifetime;" Professor-Director Has Authored New Moss Hart Biography

Bob Aaron  
*Illinois Wesleyan University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news>

---

### Recommended Citation

Aaron, Bob, "Curtain Goes Up in April IWU to Stage Moss Hart Farce "Once in a Lifetime;" Professor-Director Has Authored New Moss Hart Biography" (2000). *News and Events*. 751.

<https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news/751>

This Article is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by Digital Commons @ IWU with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this material in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/ or on the work itself. This material has been accepted for inclusion by faculty at Illinois Wesleyan University. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@iwu.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@iwu.edu).

©Copyright is owned by the author of this document.

March 13, 2000

**CONTACT:** Bob Aaron, 309/556-3181

## **Curtain Goes Up in April IWU to Stage Moss Hart Farce "Once in a Lifetime;" Professor-Director Has Authored New Moss Hart Biography**

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.—It has one laugh after another!

That's Jared Brown's quick take on Moss Hart's classic farce, "Once in a Lifetime," which he will direct next month, when it's staged at Illinois Wesleyan University's McPherson Theatre.

Brown, IWU professor of theatre arts, ranks the rollicking comedy-love story among his top five plays when it comes to laughs.

"Moss Hart," Brown said, "was a great comic writer with a brilliant comic technique."

And, Brown should know. He's wrapping up a landmark biography of the play's author.

Brown gained insights into Hart and his plays, in part, by talking to the likes of Academy Award-winner Gregory Peck, singer-actress Julie Andrews, and singer-actor Robert Goulet, who starred in films or plays written or directed by Hart—as well as actress Kitty Carlisle, Hart's widow.

### ***"Once in a Lifetime"***

Commenting on the upcoming IWU production, Brown said: "I hope it's one of the funniest productions the audience has ever seen. It's an American classic. It's a play that sets the standard for farce in the 20th century."

"Once in a Lifetime" is a collaboration between Hart and George S. Kaufman, a two-time Pulitzer Prize winner. Hart and Kaufman also teamed up on other legendary Broadway plays: "Merrily We Roll Along" (1934), "You Can't Take It With You" (1936), and "The Man Who Came to Dinner" (1939).

The plot of "Once in a Lifetime" is reminiscent of the film classic "Singing in the Rain," according to Brown, since they deal with the time "when Hollywood first talked." The play centers on three vaudevillians, who go to Hollywood at the dawn of sound films to start a school of elocution,

Brown said, "for actors who had incomprehensible accents." Two of those vaudevillians fall in love.

"There are ups-and-downs in the plot," Brown said, "but they wind up conquering Hollywood and running a studio. All the characters are highly exaggerated."

Among those hyperbolic characters are a gossip columnist, modeled on the likes of Hedda Hopper and Louella Parsons, and movie directors garbed in jodphurs and gripping whips.

Originally, the play was written for 50 actors and five sets. The IWU production will use more than 20 students and feature a big dance number.

The three IWU students who play the vaudevillians are: Laura-Kate Burleson, a senior majoring in theatre from Waukegan, Ill.; Jeff Pins, a junior majoring in theatre from Gurnee, Ill.; and Jonathan Rowsey, a junior majoring in music theatre from Oak Lawn, Ill.

## **Moss Hart Remembered**

Playwright and director Moss Hart (1904-1961), born in New York City, was an office boy to a theatrical producer early in his career. His first play, written at age 19, was a flop. He then wrote "Once in a Lifetime," which was fine-tuned by George S. Kaufman and became a hit, launching his career. In addition to his collaborations with Kaufman, Hart teamed up with Kurt Weill and Ira Gershwin for "Lady in the Dark" in 1941.

"'Lady in the Dark' is a play about psychoanalysis," Brown explained, "a serious subject for a musical, which shows Hart's versatility."

Hart also collaborated with famed songwriter Irving Berlin and playwright Robert Sherwood on other projects.

Hart's film credits include the screenplay for the Academy Award-winning "Gentleman's Agreement" (Best Picture, 1947), where Gregory Peck stars as a magazine writer who pretends to be Jewish to chronicle the affects of bigotry, and the screenplay for the 1954 version of "A Star Is Born," starring Judy Garland.

On Broadway, Hart is remembered for directing two landmark musicals: "My Fair Lady," starring Julie Andrews and Rex Harrison, and "Camelot," starring Andrews, Richard Burton, and Robert Goulet.

## **Jared Brown Profiled**

Brown, who won IWU's top teaching honor in 1997, the DuPont Award for Teaching Excellence, is the author of "The Fabulous Lunts: A Biography of Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne" (1986), "Zero Mostel: A Biography" (1989), and "Theatre in America During the Revolution" (1995). The Lunts' biography tells the story of the husband-and-wife acting team that dominated American theatre for three decades. The Mostel biography chronicles the life of the Tony Award-winning actor best known for his role in "Fiddler on the Roof," who was blacklisted as a communist during the McCarthy era of the 1940s and 1950s.

When Brown received the DuPont award he commented on his teaching philosophy, noting that as a director, his goal is to work with each actor on an individual basis.

"That means finding what motivates each actor," he explained, "and what can pull the best performance from that actor. Similarly, as a teacher, I try to discover how each student can be stimulated to produce his or her best work."

Brown, a New York City native, got an early start in acting. At about age 10, he and his father had their own radio program, "Barnaby and Mr. O'Malley." As a youngster, Brown also worked in "The Life of Riley," on radio, and then on television as a friend of Riley's son. He also acted on other national radio and television programs, including: "Lux Radio Theatre," "Ozzie and Harriet," and "Lassie."

He joined the IWU faculty in 1989 as professor of theatre and director of the School of Theatre Arts, a post he stepped down from last year. Brown was a faculty member at Western Illinois University from 1965 to 1989.

Brown earned a bachelor of fine arts degree in drama from Ithaca College in New York state, a master of arts degree in theatre from San Francisco State College, and a doctorate in theatre from the University of Minnesota.

## **Play Information**

Performances of "Once in a Lifetime" will be April 18, 19, 20, 21, and 22 at 8 p.m. and at 2 p.m. on April 22. All performances are at IWU's McPherson Theatre, 304 E. Graham St., Bloomington.

Tickets are \$4 each for Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday performances; tickets for Friday and Saturday performances are \$6 each. Tickets are \$1 for students with a valid I.D. To order tickets—and for information about ticket prices for faculty, students, and seniors—call the McPherson Theatre Box Office at 309/556-3232.

## **About IWU**

IWU, founded in 1850, enrolls about 2,070 students in a College of Liberal Arts, and individual schools of Music, Theatre Arts, Art, and Nursing. Since 1994, these facilities have been added to the IWU campus: a \$15 million athletics and recreation center, a \$25 million science center, a \$6.8 million residence hall, a \$5.1 million Center for Liberal Arts, and a \$1.65 million baseball stadium. A \$23 million library and a \$6 million student center are under construction.

Kiplinger's Personal Finance Magazine ranks Illinois Wesleyan University 12th among the nation's top 1,600 private colleges in providing a top-quality education at an affordable cost. Also sharing IWU's rank are Princeton University and Dartmouth College.

--30—

**Editor's Note:** To arrange an interview with Jared Brown about the upcoming production of "Once in a Lifetime" or his forthcoming biography of Moss Hart, call him at 309/556-3324.

