



# THE SOUND OF MUSIC

Wednesday, October 7, 2015  
Ahmanson Theatre, Los Angeles

## THE SOUND OF MUSIC

*The Sound of Music* is a stage and film musical based on *The Story of the Trapp Family Singers*, the memoir of Maria von Trapp.

The story takes place in Austria at the brink of World War II. Maria, a plucky nun turned governess, is charged with caring for the seven children of a military captain. Maria's delightful teaching of music to the children leads to their becoming a celebrated touring act, the innocence of which is shattered as the realities of Nazi rule become inescapable. Notably, many details of the von Trapp family story were changed to increase the dramatic impact of the musical version.

Inspired by a pair of German films about the von Trapps from the mid-1950s, the stage version of *The Sound of Music* premiered on Broadway in 1959. The production won multiple Tony Awards, and the show has been revived many times since, including a renowned 1998 Broadway revival. The 1965 film version starring Julie Andrews won five Academy Awards and is still beloved today by viewers around the world.

Written by Rodgers and Hammerstein, the songs of *The Sound of Music*—including “My Favorite Things,” “Do, Re, Mi,” “Edelweiss,” and the title song—have been celebrated for more than half a century.

## RODGERS AND HAMMERSTEIN

Composer Richard Rodgers and librettist Oscar Hammerstein were one of the most prolific, successful songwriting teams in the history of musical theatre.

The pair's first collaboration, *Oklahoma!* (1943), marked the start of a new theatrical genre: the musical play, which combined elements of musical comedy, operetta, and drama. Here, song-and-dance numbers were used to deepen character development and further the plot, rather than being mere diversions as in earlier musical comedies.

Rodgers and Hammerstein went on to collaborate on some of the most significant musicals of the twentieth century: *Carousel*, *South Pacific*, *The King and I*, and, of course, *The Sound of Music*. The Broadway productions of these shows were at the heart of the golden age of musical theatre in the 1940s and 1950s.

## AUSTRIA AND THE THIRD REICH

Austria was invaded by the Third Reich in 1938 and forcibly annexed by Nazi Germany. It would remain a federal state of Germany until the end of World War II. Yet when Hitler accompanied German troops into Austria, he was greeted by ecstatic crowds. Over the next several years, Austrian Jews would suffer brutal oppression including deportation to concentration camps and expropriation of property.

Was Austria “the first victim of Hitlerite aggression,” in the words of the Allies upon reestablishing Austria as an independent state after the war? Or did significant sectors of the Austrian population support unification with Nazi Germany? These questions have been the subject of fierce debate and controversy for decades. How does awareness of this complicated discourse inform your view of the history presented in *The Sound of Music*?

## **AHMANSON THEATRE**

The Ahmanson Theatre is one of four venues at the Los Angeles Music Center, one of the largest performing-arts centers in the United States. Across the street from Walt Disney Concert Hall (home of the Los Angeles Philharmonic) and sharing a plaza with the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion (home of LA Opera and Gloria Kaufman Presents Dance at the Music Center) and the smaller Mark Taper Forum, where intimate and innovative theatre pieces are featured, the Ahmanson brings large-scale theatrical productions to Los Angeles, including many world premieres.

The Ahmanson opened on April 12, 1967, with a production of *More Stately Mansions* starring Ingrid Bergman, Arthur Hill, and Colleen Dewhurst. The theatre has since hosted a wide variety of comedies, dramas, musicals, and revivals of classic works for the theatre.

Built from 1962 to 1967, the Ahmanson was designed by the important Los Angeles architect Welton Becket (1902–1969). Becket designed the Music Center in the style of New Formalism, which emphasized geometric shapes. Becket was also the designer of LA landmarks such as the Capitol Records building, the Beverly Hilton Hotel, and the Cinerama Dome. The Ahmanson underwent a major renovation in the 1990s.

The Ahmanson Theatre is named for businessman and philanthropist Howard F. Ahmanson Sr., who was instrumental in funding its construction. Ahmanson earned his fortune during the Great Depression selling fire insurance for homes under foreclosure, and also invested in real estate and oil. He was a founder of an insurance and savings and loan association, H.F. Ahmanson and Co. In the mid-20th century, he was an important figure in Los Angeles cultural life, serving on the board of the Museum of Science and Industry and supporting the founding of the Los Angeles County Art Institute (now Otis) and the construction of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Music Center. Ahmanson also helped fund a biosciences research center at USC.