

“The Pajama Game” (1973-1974): tops and bottoms in black and white



After Cab Calloway’s success on Broadway with *Porgy and Bess* (1952-1954) and *Hello, Dolly!* (1968-1972), the Great White Way seemed to be wide open to another long-term run with the revival of *The Pajama Game*. Despite great cards in hand, the curtain dropped on the show after just 65 performances. The Hi De Ho Blog tells you why Cab has better luck in a white tuxedo than in black pajamas...

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Poster of The Pajama Game, created on Broadway in 1954

Every high school and community theatre knows the story of *The Pajama Game*, so popular in those places that it has been performed almost everywhere in the US and UK. “The story of labor at a mid-western pajama factory on the verge of union strike (in an effort to get a 7 ½ cent raise) spoke to the average working American. Complicating matters, of course, is a romance that breaks out between the factory’s new superintendent and the head of the union grievance committee. In the end, everyone gets what they want.” (Mark Robinson, *Broadway Musical Time Machine: Looking Back at The Pajama Game*, 2018).

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Based on the book *7 ½ Cents* by Richard BISSELL (1913-1977), *The Pajama Game* was adapted for stage by the author and by George ABBOTT ([full synopsis here](#)). It became Richard ADLER (1921-2012) and Jerry ROSS's (1926-1955) first score for Broadway. And an immediate success, thanks to a great bunch of popular songs (“*Steam Heat*”, “*Hernando's Hideaway*”, “*Hey There*”), and innovative and stylish choreography by Bob FOSSE (1927-1987). The show opened on May 13, 1954 at Broadway's St. James Theatre, and lasted 1,063 performances!



Poster of *The Pajama Game*, the movie released in 1957

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As fast as producers get new ideas, in 1957, *The Pajama Game* got its film version, with almost the entire Broadway cast, except Janis PAIGE who was replaced by Doris DAY (if SINATRA had accepted the male lead role, Janis Paige would have been on the bill). Warner Brothers teamed stage director George Abbott and film director Stanley DONEN to ensure both a faithful transfer and a cinematic rendition of the original show. It became another successful Hollywood product.

RICHARD ADLER AND BERT WOOD
IN ASSOCIATION WITH NELSON PELITZ
PRESENT

BARBARA McNAIR **CAB CALLOWAY** **HAL LINDEN**

THE NEW MUSICAL PRODUCTION

THE PAJAMA GAME

Based on the novel "75 Cents" by Richard Stodd

BOOK BY **GEORGE ABBOTT & RICHARD BISSELL** MUSIC AND LYRICS BY **RICHARD ADLER & JERRY ROSS**

ORIGINALLY CHOREOGRAPHED BY **BOB FOSSE** MUSICAL NUMBERS STAGED BY **ZOYA LEPORSKA**

WITH **WILLARD WATERMAN** **CHRIS CALLOWAY** **MARC JORDAN** **MARALYN NELL** **MARGRET COLEMAN** **DALLAS JOHANN** **WYETTA TURNER**

AND **SHARRON MILLER**

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An early ad (October 10, 1973) published in the NY Times.
Notice that Maralyn Nell won't appear in the final cast, replaced by Mary Jo Catlett.

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Why a revival in 1973?

The early Seventies were hard times for Broadway productions. As a *Variety* writer states about 1973: *“It was a year in which box-office receipts on Broadway declined to the lowest point in a decade (...). With crime in the streets a major concern in virtually all cities, abroad as well as the U.S., theatre attendance was obviously affected in New York. Added deterrents to box-office trade in Manhattan were the widely publicized prostitution, dope peddling and other riff-raff activity in the Times Square area.”*

Alyn Shipton underlines the prevailing bad market conditions quoting journalist William E. Sarmento: *“This is the worst season to hit Broadway in history. Prices are high, shows are generally not worth the price, and no one seems to be going to the theater regularly anymore.”*

In *Variety*, dated January 9, 1974, Hobe Morrison explains that 1973 *“saw the intensification of the smash hit or dire flop tendency on Broadway.”*

So, for any producer, the idea of doing a revival of an old success is THE idea! Therefore, as usual several theaters raised their curtain on adaptations, with the likes of *On the Town* (1972), *Man of La Mancha* (1973), *A Streetcar Named Deisre* (1973), *No, No Nanette* (1973), *Candide* (1974), *Guys & Dolls* (1976) But as a *Variety* critic explains: *“Almost any revival tends to lack the element of discovery that may be an outstanding asset of a new show. That may be avoided if the revival in question is given a strikingly different interpretation or treatment, or if the radically different casting changes the values. (...) This production must thus depend on a new generation of audiences or the unsurprised acceptance of repeaters.”* (*Variety*, December 12, 1973)

In order to update the plot, a mixed casting was imagined, with one white successful actor with a Tony Award in hand, a black beauty with voice and charms (and a sulfurous past) and an old-timer, bankable singer who can act too. Three aces in hand for a start, that’s a pretty good start for Broadway.

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The 3 lead-actors and their lead-roles

Barbara McNAIR (1934-2007)

Chicagoan, Barbara McNAIR was known at the time of *The Pajama Game* as a singer for Motown, an actress (with Sidney Poitier and Elvis Presley, and in *Mission: Impossible* for TV). *Playboy* readers remember her appearance in October 1968. She was the first black female to run her own TV show in the late Sixties. In April 1973, she's cleared from a drug rap while her then husband, Rick (Frederick) Manzie is held on charges of possession of heroin (he'll be murdered a few years later, apparently due to his connections with the mob). She lost more than \$500,000 from cancellations due to this drug arrest. The start of a revival at this moment of her life was a relief and a wonderful opportunity to get back in front of the curtain – and not in front of a judge.

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In *The Pajama Game*, Barbara plays the role of Babe Williams, the leader of the union’s grievance committee. She soon falls in love for the new manager, Sid.

Interestingly enough, Barbara already recorded one of the hits of *The Pajama Game* in 1959 for her debut album “Front Row Center” (Coral), the famous “[*Steam Heat*](#)”, interpreted by Sharron Miller in the musical.

Hal LINDEN (born in 1931)

Tony Award for Best Acting in 1971 after two seasons in the musical *The Rothschilds*, Hal LINDEN was at the top of his musical and Broadway career when he’s cast for the lead role of Sid Sorokin in *The Pajama Game* revival. After this Broadway flop, Hal Linden will find fame again with the TV series *Barney Miller* where he played the lead role in 160 episodes between 1975 and 1982. He remains very active until recent years on numerous TV series.

In *The Pajama Game*, Hal plays the role of Sid Sorokin, an ambitious new factory manager of a factory that produces pajamas, who falls in love with Babe, the girl from the union.

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Cab CALLOWAY (66 in 1973)

As Alyn Shipton points it out in his book about Cab, like many jazz musicians who spend most of the time on the road longing for being home, and once at home die to leave for the road again, the King of Hi De Ho was a perfect example. When *Hello, Dolly!* ended after lead-actress Pearl BAILEY walked out, Cab had to go back home. Soon, Calloway will be a name on the marquee of Catskills clubs, Miami hotels, cabarets in Atlantic City, stages on the East Coast... The New Kingston Trio, Pat Suzuki, plus an exhausted George Jessel replaced after a few dates by Allan Sherman, along with Cab Calloway were supposed to relive the golden age of the music hall. This was the Roy Radin Vaudeville Revue (1971-1972)...

So when the producers approached Cab for a new Broadway show, he might have felt thankful and excited to focus on a new and ambitious project.

In *The Pajama Game*, Cab plays the role of Hines, the factory's time-study expert. He opens the show by introducing the audience to the story. Workers complain about Hines who only lives his life by the clock (but secretly in love with the boss's secretary, Gladys [Sharron MILLER]; he's also an unbearable jealous man). The description of his character states “he is the jealous type, but has a kind heart and a talent in knife-throwing. Surprisingly soft around the edges.”

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Also in the cast



Chris CALLOWAY (1945-2008)

Cab's daughter, is also in the cast. Daddy has secured a job for Chris, despite her sudden departure from *Hello, Dolly!* (to marry Hugh MASEKELA) that would have put her on the Broadway blacklist.

By the greatest coincidence (!), Chris was Barbara McNair's understudy. Understudies are important in the history of Broadway! For the first *Pajama Game*, they're part of the history: the young Shirley McLAINE was "discovered" when she went on for Carol HANEY (who just had sprained her ankle) in the "Steam Heat" number on Broadway (perfect theater legend, isn't it?)...

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Afro-American's critic, Charles Farrow, spotted Chris Calloway among the cast in his review (along with Margret Coleman and Wyetta Turner, the three of them appeared together in the previous production of *Hello, Dolly!*) as did drama critic Emory Lewis: “She a girl to watch.” (“Hey there! *Pajama Game* still clicks”, *The Record*, December 10, 1973).

Another reviewer said about Chris she is “the long-legged, redheaded freckle who never quits carbonating her enthusiastic easy-labors, a true chip off the old pro.” (in “Voice of Broadway”, *The News Item*, December 24, 1973).

Nevertheless, from December 20, Chris started doubling from her role in *Pajama Game* for a two-week engagement along with her sister Cecelia (aka Lael) at Chris Cody's in New York.

It is also interesting to note that a good proportion of *Hello, Dolly!*'s black cast was among the members of the new project.

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Sharron MILLER (b-1946)

According to Charles Farrow (*Afro-American*), her performance “works so well towards making ‘The Pajama game’ a happy and joyous time. Backed by some strikingly beautiful dancers and singers, Miss Miller was a singular highlight of the show.” Sharron Miller’s turn as Gladys was almost universally adored by the critics. Even the usually irascible John Simon described her as “a winsome dancer with a true flair and the most expressive eyes ever to light up a cavernous theater.”

Now the director of *Sharron Miller’s Academy for the Performing Arts* in New Jersey, we were lucky enough to catch up with Ms. Miller in 2019. She has nothing but fond memories of her work on *The Pajama Game*. She recalls being asked to audition for George Abbott (it wasn’t an open cattle-call) with no particular discussions or issues regarding the racial makeup of the cast. Sharron adored working with Cab who was reportedly always the gentleman, even after the occasional backstage tipple.

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Tiger HAYNES (1914-1994)

Tiger, the famous actor and jazz musician who later appeared as the Tin Man in the original Broadway cast of *The Wiz* (1975-1979), was the stand-by for Cab Calloway. In *The Pajama Game* revival, he played the role of Charlie.

and...

- Marc JORDAN (1931-2014), as Prez
- Gerrit de BEER (b-1935), as Joe
- Willard WATERMAN (1914-1995), as Hasler
- Mary Jo CATLETT (b-1938), as Mabel
- David BRUMMEL, as 1st Helper
- Jon ENGSTROM, as 2nd Helper
- Margret COLEMAN, as Mae
- Wyetta TURNER, as Poopsie
- Hal NORMAN, as Salesman
- Baron WILSON, as Pop.

DANCERS: Dru ALEXANDRINE, Eileen CASEEY, Vicki FREDERICK, Mickey GUNNERSEN, Sally NEAL, Jo Ann OGAWA, P.J. BENJAMIN, Hank BRUNJES, Jon ENGSTROM, Ben HARNEY, Randl HARRIS, David KRESSER, Jr., Cameron MASON and Chester WALKER.

SINGERS: Chalyce BROWN, Susan DYAS, Rebecca HOODWIN, Patricia MOLINE, Marie SANTELL, Cynthia WHITE, Gerrit de BEER, David BRUMMEL, Doug CARFRAE, Stan PAGE, Ward SMITH, Teddy WILLIAMS.

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Tryouts in Washington and Toronto

September '73 sees the first articles about the casting and the production. The three weeks of rehearsals begin in October at the Riverside Plaza Hotel in New York, West 73rd Street.

We are lucky that a photographer from The Friedman-Abeles company (a pre-eminent firm that documented Broadway theater productions in the 1950s-1970s) was sent to capture them. Here's a special clip with we cut just for your entertainment:

<https://youtu.be/0RtVWnGOE14>

- 1 - Cab, Barbara McNair, Hal Linden
- 2 - George Abbott, Hal, Cab, Barbara, Richard Adler
- 3 - George, Barbara, Hal, Cab
- 4 - Barbara, Hal, Richard
- 5 - Richard, Zoya Leporska, George
- 6 - Cab, Sharron Miller, George
- 7 - Joyce Brown and the Girls (Chris Calloway with long dress)
- 8 - Chris and Cab
- 9 - Cab and Mary Jo Catlett
- 10 - Cab and the Girls

Customary tryouts are set in Washington, DC for three weeks at the Opera House (2,300 seats). There, when the average weekly gross is \$140,500, *The Pajama Game* only collected \$27,500 in first week (3 previews and 1 performance), \$80,500 in the second week and \$92,150 in the third and last week (source: *Variety*, Oct 31 and Nov 14, 1973).

The audience and critics are pretty excited and most of the papers are positive. Only *Variety* has a negative review with one main reproach: the story has aged.

Fun fact: during the Washington tryouts, on an afternoon off, Cab went to Laurel racetrack and won on a horse named “Pajama Tops” – but that was his only lucky moment during the revival!

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In Toronto, the same enthusiasm hits the audience, but the critics are less excited.

During the performances at the O’Keefe Centre (3,155 seats) in Toronto where the average weekly gross is \$112,000, *The Pajama Game* only collected \$71,750 in the first week, and \$75,400 in the second and final week (source: *Variety*, Dec 5, 1973).

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Limited run at the Lunt-Fontanne Theatre

The result is only a limited run at the [Lunt-Fontanne theatre](#). The show opens on December 9, 1973.

"The production was capitalized at \$300,000, cost about \$295,000 to open" (Variety, December 12, 1973).

The opening week at Lunt-Fontanne Theatre (1,500 seats, \$110,000 average weekly gross) with 5 previews and 1 performance, the play collected \$45,500. A *Variety* specialist writes that the show breaks even at around \$70,000 a week and could net approximately \$20,000 at capacity. Then, second week: \$34,700; third week: \$91,300!

After a few performances, **bad reviews** by *NY Times* and *Variety*, and **production management issues**, **the gross remains too low**.

Nevertheless, some still believe in the success of the revival, like the glamorous magazine *Harper's Bazaar* which publishes a *Focus on Cab Calloway and The Pajama Game*, revealing that "a brand new edition of the Hepster's Dictionary is being put to bed along Publisher's Row." That won't happen, but the famous slang dictionary will be included in Cab's autobiography "*Of Minnie the Mocher, and Me*" released that same year.

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*Public Relations can't change the low gross,
despite Cab and Barbara's efforts
in participating to special events (Daily News, December 22, 1973)*

Yet, in mid-December, producer (and co-composer) Richard ADLER is reported to have said to his cast that *"he will fight till his hair's white to stay open"* (Earl Wilson, *Times Recorder*, December 19, 1973).

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*A TV appearance in Mike Douglas TV show along with Barbara McNair.
Laughs on the set, grin at the box office.*

It's January 16 and it's already too late to save the musical...

At the end of the matinee performance that January 20, 1974, which was supposed to be the last one, Cab Calloway heads the rescue squad to save the revival from folding. *“I pledge \$50,000”* [\$260,000 today!] towards operating expenses to keep the show on the boards and being able to switch to another theater, new rehearsals, new crew... Alas, even if **Cab said “I’ll work for nothing!”**, after reopening January 22, the final curtain drops on February 3, 1974, after 65 performances. Shipton points out: *“Judging from all the reviews, the revival was quite good. But not good enough to ensure a transfer”* to another theater after the limited engagement at the Lunt-Fontanne.

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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gaEKKCRqnx4&feature=emb_rel_end

- 1 - Cab and the Girls during the opening
- 2 - Hal and Barbara
- 3 and 4 - Cab and his secretary played by Mary Jo Catlett singing "I'll Never Be Jealous Again"
- 5 - Barbara and Hal
- 6 - Hal singing "Hey There!"
- 7 - Barbara and Hal
- 8 and 9 - Chris and Cab
- 10 and 11 - Willard Waterman, Marc Jordan, Mary Jo, Hal and Cab
- 12 - Cab and the Girls
- 13 and 14 - Sharron and Cab
- 15 - Cab throwing knives during the picnic
- 16 - Cab, Hal and Barbara
- 17 - Hal, Barbara and the workers at the picnic
- 18 - Barbara and Hal
- 19 - Bow with the whole cast (Tiger Haynes is on the far left)
- 20 - Hal and Barbara, Sharron and Cab, Margret Coleman and the cast
- 21 - Unknown, Zoya, Richard, Cab, George, Barbara and Hal

So let's try to make a review in two parts, by examining what worked and what didn't.

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So, what was great?



The mixed cast and integrated company

The really new addition to the revival, even if nothing actually deals with racial issues, is civil rights. Only a couple of lines have been added in the play.

“The re-programming of this musical with some stellar black entertainment performers is an obvious effort to get additional mileage and may pay off, if the first day’s attendance is any indication. ‘The Pajama Game’ is attracting a larger number of blacks to the Opera House [in Washington, DC] and this fact must be saying something to the stage brokers down to the Potomac.” (Charles Farrow, “Tuneful ‘Pajama Game’ has Zesty Vim Vitality”, *Afro-American*, November 10, 1973).

But Warren Hoffman adds in his book about race and the Broadway musical, *“Does casting a show with black actors or an integrated cast automatically make it “modern”?* as producers hoped it would...

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Cab's voice and acting

Alyn Shipton writes: *“In his stage musicals, from Porgy through Hello, Dolly! and culminating in his sort-lived comic acting role in The Pajama Game, Cab had been extending his professional range. His voice had developed into a fine musical theater baritone, capable of projecting forcefully into all but the largest theaters, and his abilities as an actor grew at the same time.”*

“Cab Calloway brings an old pro’s finesse and infectious realization to the other starring part of the time-study man.” (Variety, December 10, 1973).

“The greatest hit of the enchanted evening was veteran Cab Calloway (...). Last night he did a soft-shoe to ‘I’ll Never Be Jealous Again’ that broke my heart with its dazzling beauty.” (Emory Lewis, “Hey there! Pajama Game still clicks”, The Record, December 10, 1973)

“The Calloway feet can tapdance in total silence, could possibly bring the sandman sweet slumber, and even though the performer grunts once during a toe-reach just to remind us that he’s older than we think he is, we

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laugh. He’s kidding.” (Walter Kerr, *Hey There, What Happened?*, NY Times, December 16, 1973)

“Cab Calloway, as indestructible as George Abbott (who once again directed), exudes charm from every pore, and skill in every direction; he is doubtless as irresistible to the chorus members in back of him and the stagehands in the wings as to the paying customers out front.” (John Simon, “*Fat Pickings*”, *New York Magazine*, December 24, 1973).

Good reviews excerpts

From the posters and bills

“A big, brisk, rousing show. Bursting with vitality and sunny songs. One of those rare musicals in which almost every number is a dandy.” (Douglas Watt, *NY Daily News*).

“Brilliant, a Broadway triumph, with a splendid cast headed by the beautiful Barbara McNair, the wonderful Cab Calloway and the engaging Hal Linden – A handsome production, delightful, melodious entertainment, fine songs and warm-hearted fun” (Richard Watts, *NY Post*)

“Zestful, cheerful musical. This Pajama Game cast is all tops.” (John Simon, *NY Magazine*)

“The first good musical of the season, as fresh as a daisy and just as welcome.” (Martin Gottfried, *Women’s Year*)

“Wonderful!” (Geoffrey Holder, NBC-TV)

“Funderful!” (Bob Salmaggi, WNEW-TV)

“Marvelous!” (Leonard Harris, NBC_TV)

With good editing they even use a bad review for their publicity:

“A show of great and charming numbers [in fact, a reference to the first Pajama Game]. Absolutely adored by the [edited: “paying preview”] audience. Pulsing, tough Broadway music carrying the whole audience with it on the bounce and wit of its melody [another reference to the first Pajama Game].” (Clive Barnes, *NY Times*)

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MATS. TOM'W. at 2, SUN. at 3.
SPEC. NEW YEAR'S EVE PERF. at 7:30
“A ZESTFUL CHEERFUL ‘PAJAMA
GAME!’ THE CAST IS ALL TOPS. NO
BOTTOMS.” —*John Simon, N.Y. Mag.*

“A MARVELOUS MUSICAL WITH A
SPLENDID CAST. A FORMIDABLE SCORE
BY RICHARD ADLER AND JERRY ROSS.
I WAS EXCITED OVER THE SHEER FUN
OF IT. THE CAST SIMPLY COULD NOT
BE BETTER. ‘PAJAMA GAME’ IS LOVE-
LY. IF IT DOES NOT BRING CROWDS
TO BROADWAY, THEN THERE JUST
AIN'T NONE.”—*Leonard Harris, CBS-TV*

“BRILLIANT! A BROADWAY TRIUMPH!
A RESOUNDING SUCCESS!”

—*Richard Watts, N.Y. Post*

“‘THE PAJAMA GAME’ IS WONDERFUL,
CHARMING MUSICAL COMEDY.”

—*Geoffrey Holder, NBC-TV*

“THIS IS ONE OF THOSE RARE MUSI-
CALS IN WHICH ALMOST EVERY NUM-
BER IS A DANDY. A ROUSING SHOW.”

—*Douglas Watt, Daily News*

BARBARA McNAIR CALLOWAY HAL LINDEN
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From the press

“The Pajama Game caper came last weekend to the Opera House in the Kennedy Center and was greeted with open arms. The marvelous concoction of tuneful melodies, flashy, colorful settings and a bevy of actors, full of zesty vim and vitality, re-created a musical hit of the early 1950’s.” (Charles Farrow, “Tuneful ‘Pajama Game’ has Zesty Vim Vitality”, *Afro-American*, November 10, 1973).

“I think [this revival] is vastly superior this time around. (...) Surprisingly, it does not seem at all outdated. (...) The cast is pure joy.” (Emory Lewis, “Hey there! Pajama Game still clicks”, *The Record*, December 10, 1973).

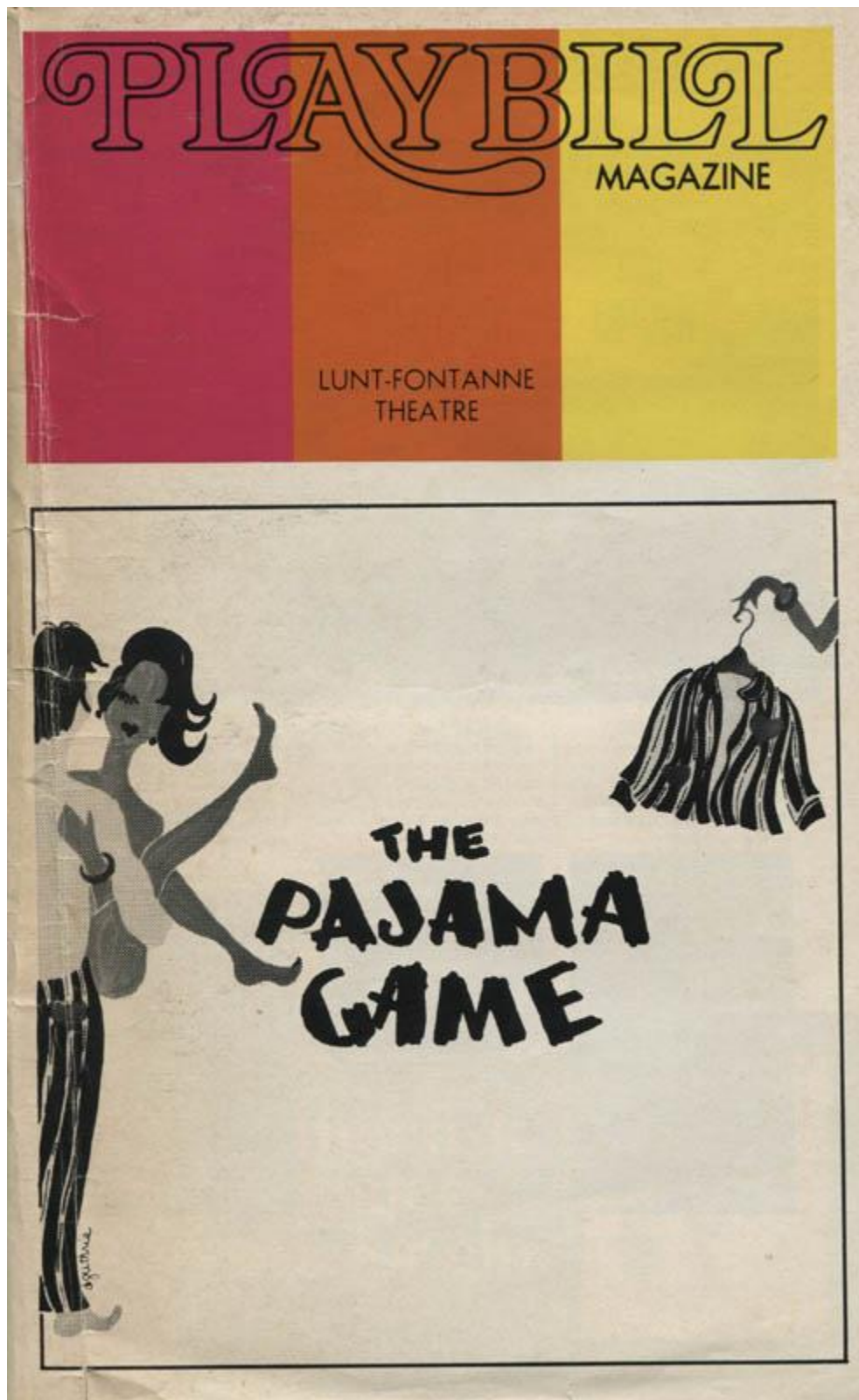
“Barbara McNair sings and moves with a perfect blend of vigor and grace, and is so beautiful to boot that any man wouldn’t sell his soul for her clearly has no soul.” (John Simon, *Fat Pickings*, *New York Magazine*, December 24, 1973).

“Hal Linden sings better than almost any actor around, and acts far better than any singer, and has, on top of that, a prepossessingly masculine presence.” (John Simon, *Fat Pickings*, *New York Magazine*, December 24, 1973).

“Hal Linden is outstanding as Sid Sorokin, the shop foreman. Far and away the finest of our younger musical-comedy leading men, he brings a zest to the revival that is not quite matched by any of the other principals.” (Douglas Watt, “Pajama Game’ in Brisk-Revival”, *Daily News*, December 10, 1973).

“This Pajama cast is all tops, no bottoms, and no end of fun.” (John Simon, *Fat Pickings*, *New York Magazine*, December 24, 1973).

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“The Pajama Game” (1973-1974): tops and bottoms in black and white

So, what was wrong?

The book?

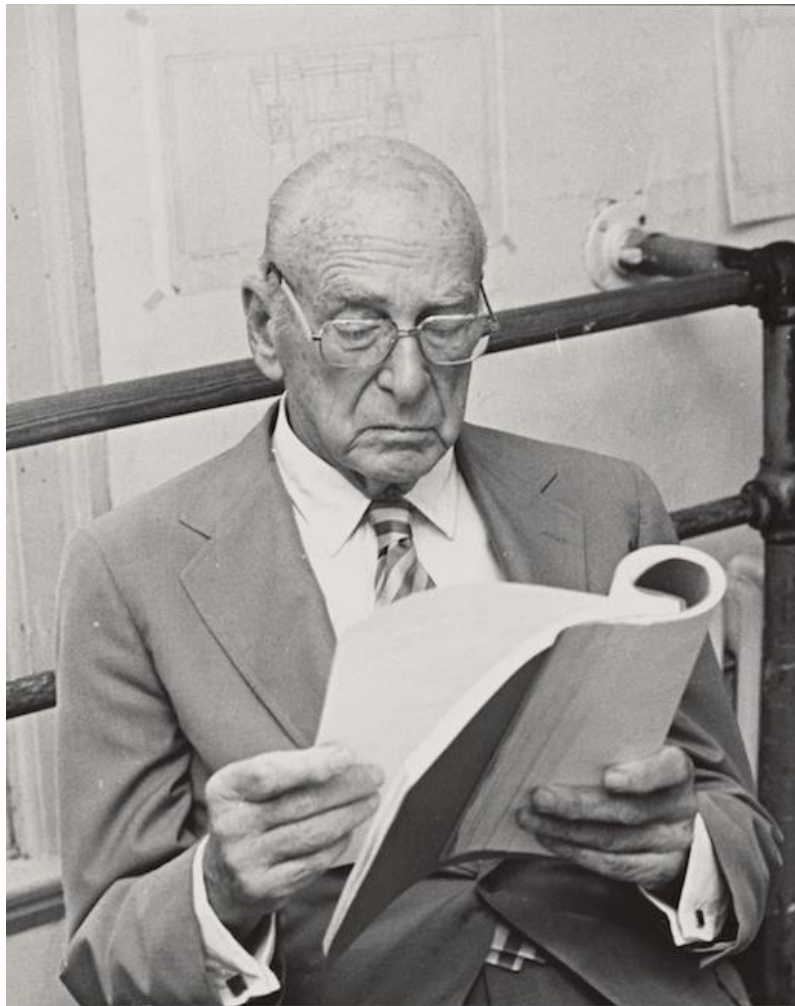
The *Variety* critic perfectly summed the point up: “*Few revivals are as true to originals as The Pajama Game.... That’s a strength and perhaps a limitation of this repeat of the musical.*” (*Variety*, December 10, 1973).

Compared to the plays and musicals from 1973 and post-Vietnam war era, *The Pajama Game* looks like an old-fashioned and traditionalist play with its plot where a picnic held for employees is the most thrilling experience a factory could live... meanwhile the Sexual revolution happened!

“(T)imes have changed. The book, once so modern (a finale hero who wore pajama bottoms with a finale heroine who wore pajama tops!) has passed, perhaps not happily, into history, and its social conscience—remember “Pins and Needles”—now seems jejune. (...) “The Pajama Game” would not be on my list of the greatest American musicals—would it be on yours?— yet I can see that it might evoke memories of a past. I do, however, think it could here have been better, more imaginatively done. Yet the music still stands—especially in elevators. And the audience I was with obviously enjoyed it.” (Clive Barnes, ‘The Pajama Game’ Returns, *New York Times*, December 10, 1973).

Showing a conflict between management and labor in the 1950s U.S. was probably a bit daring. Workers attempt to get a raise (7 ½ cents, equal to 16% of their salary!) is quite a fight!

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The director?

Faithful to his creation, and his genuine talent as a playwright and play doctor, 86 year-old George ABBOTT decided to add only one new song and change two lines in the book (about the black and white situation of the main characters). When Hal Linden tries to date black Barbara McNair, she says, “*It wouldn’t work... There’s a thing called racial prejudice.*” Linden, supposedly of Polish descent in the script, says, “*You don’t like to go out with us Polacks?*” Even if it brought down the house in DC, the Polish community there protested...

George Abbott died at the venerable age of 108 (he directed his last stage production at 106!), a few weeks after Cab Calloway, in January 1995. At this time, he was working on a revision of the second act of *Pajama Game*!

“George Abbott, who staged the original “Pajama Game” in 1954, is doing the same for the revival, but seem to have lost his touch” (Lou Cedrone, “Pajama Game’ Revival Is Too Sleepy, Miscast”, *The Evening Sun*, November 2, 1973).

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The casting?

“The black and white arrangement is briefly and very smartly handled, but too many of the roles originally written for whites, simply do not fit blacks, the lines wrong, the posing unbelievable.” (Lou Cedrone, “‘Pajama Game’ Revival Is Too Sleepy, Miscast”, *The Evening Sun*, November 2, 1973)

“As the heroine, Babe, Barbara McNair sings vibrantly and looks beautiful, but her acting has the wooden air of a nightclub singer in search of a torch. Hal Linden is almost as badly miscast. He sings modestly and acts with all of his considerable skill, but he is not a natural juvenile lead. Cab Calloway makes as many moments as he can out of the role of Hines, the dumb supervisor, but even with Mr. Calloway the moments are limited. Best I suppose is Sharron Miller as Gladys, who comes over as a tightly packaged bundle of charm.” (Clive Barnes, “‘The Pajama Game’ Returns”, *New York Times*, December 10, 1973).

Barbara McNair *“is elegantly beautiful to the point that she’s not really natural for the role.”* (*Variety*, October, 31, 1973).

“While reading the reviews of the reviews of the 1973 Pajama Game reveals that there wasn’t much new or exciting to provide the box office boost for this revival, clearly the idea – or should we say gimmick – to integrate the cast didn’t really make the musical any more socially relevant. If anything, the cross-racial casting concept, executed in such a halfhearted style, only served to confuse the already complicated topic of race, rather than provide any new or productive insights into the matter.” (Warren Hoffman, “The Great White Way”).

“The Pajama Game” (1973-1974): tops and bottoms in black and white



Cab Calloway?

Cab “doesn’t seem comfortable for the role” (*Variety*, October, 31, 1973) - This could be the caption of the previous photo!

Broadway critic historian of musical theater Steven SUSKIN (b-1953) explains that he subbed as stage manager during the last weeks of the musical: “*The biggest challenge: how do you cue in the blackout drop when one of your stars is weaving drunkenly back and forth beneath the pipe? And what do you do when he steps down to the apron, out of reach, and starts singing “Minnie The Moocher”? Hi-de-hi-de-ho, indeed.*”

His personal (and inner view) critic of *The Pajama Game* is irrevocable: “*The revival was pretty poor; it was produced on a frayed shoestring, resulting in a cheap and ugly production. The cast was uninspired, and – other than Linden (as Sid), Mary Jo Catlett (as Mabel), and some of the dancers, not very good. (...) The ability to watch (...) the delectably corny softshoe accompanying “I’ll Never Be Jealous Again”, in more or less authentic form night after night, more than made up for the lapses.*” Cold, isn’t it?

“The Pajama Game” (1973-1974): tops and bottoms in black and white

The production?

“Result is more for nostalgia buffs than for an audience seeking a fresh production”, already wrote *Variety*’s reviewer about the tryout performances in Washington, DC in October (*Variety*, October, 31, 1973).

“The production’s design by David Guthrie seems to have been done with an eye on keeping costs down and is mostly stock company serviceable. There haven’t been so many numbers done in front of a bare curtain since vaudeville died.”

The stage production?

“None of the production numbers staged by Zoya LEPORSKA [(1920-1996) who was Bob FOSSE’s assistant in the original Broadway production] really comes off.” (*Variety*, October, 31, 1973).

“There is something lifeless about the dance, including the usually exciting ‘Steam Heat,’ and if the musical does finally come to life at the very end when the cast seems to realize they are an ensemble, it is too late in the evening.” (Lou Cedrone, “Pajama Game’ Revival Is Too Sleepy, Miscast”, *The Evening Sun*, November 2, 1973)

“It is noticeable to know that “neither the settings nor the costumes of the show were updated to represent the era of the revival” (Warren Hoffman, “The Great White Way”).

Bad reviews excerpts

The week of the opening, the musical received the following critical reaction, reported by *Variety* (December 12, 1973):

- 9 favorable (Citron, WNYC- TV; Gaver, UPI; Harris, WCBS- TV; Holder, WNBC-TV; Salmaggi, WNEW-TV; Watt, News; Watts, Post; Woodruff, WMCA).
- 2 unfavorable (Barnes, Times; Glover, AP).

“An attractive cast and a familiar, melodic score aren’t enough to bring the revival of *Pajama Game* to life” (*Variety*, October, 31, 1973).

“An outdated story and some uninspired casting are heavy handicaps.” (William Glover, “The Pajama Game’ Is For Sleeping”, *Lancaster New Era*, December 10, 1973)

“Where the first [*Pajama Game*] was brisk and well cast, the revival is droopy, dull and miscast. (...) This ‘Pajama Game’ looks like a listless bus-and-truck version of what remains one of the brightest, most tuneful presentations in the history of musical comedy.” (Lou Cedrone, “Pajama Game’ Revival Is Too Sleepy, Miscast”, *The Evening Sun*, November 2, 1973)

To quote *New York Times* critic Clive Barnes (December 10, 1973), “How classic is a classic musical? It depends a great deal on the musical. The *Pajama Game*, which opened at the Lunt-Fontanne Theater last night, was absolutely adored by the paying preview audience I saw it with on Friday night. My own reaction was more guarded, but what is my reaction against so many?” Indeed, the musical was an audience-favorite, a slightly divergent opinion was expressed by the professionals.

Hal LINDEN, principal of the cast, explained that “he sometimes regrets being an actor when he reads the newspapers: “I feel I should’ve chosen something that is more beneficial to mankind – performing seems insignificant when compared to other professions. But then I realize that people go to the theater just to escape from what they

“The Pajama Game” (1973-1974): tops and bottoms in black and white

read in the papers.” (in *The Post-Standard*, Syracuse, December 29, 1973). A statement Cab could have endorsed too!

The next revival for *The Pajama Game* on Broadway will occur successfully in 2006 with Harry CONNICK, Jr., Kelly O'HARA, Mickael McKEAN.

Cab Calloway's next stage experience would be the 1978-touring version of the musical *Bubbling Brown Sugar*. Someday, The Hi De Ho Blog will tell you its story...



“THE PAJAMA GAME”—Hal Linden, a management man, flips for Barbara McNair, a labor girl, while Cab Calloway devotes himself to Time Study and Sharon Miller supplies “Steam Heat.” The musical opens tonight at the Lunt-Fontanne.

“The Pajama Game” (1973-1974): tops and bottoms in black and white

MUSICAL NUMBERS

(songs performed by Cab Calloway are in bold)

Act I

- ***The Pajama Game Opening* by Cab CALLOWAY**
- *Racing With the Clock* by Girls and Boys
- *A New Town Is a Blue Town* by Hal LINDEN
- *I'm Not at All in Love* by Barbara McNAIR and Girls
- ***I'll Never Be Jealous Again* by Cab CALLOWAY and Mary Jo CATLETT**
- *Hey There* by Hal LINDEN
- *Her Is* by Marc JORDAN and Sharron MILLER
- *Sleep-Tite* by Barbara McNAIR and Boys and Girls
- *Once a Year Day* by Hal LINDEN, Barbara McNAIR and Company
- Danced by Sharron MILLER, Dallas JOHAN and Hank BRUNJES
- *Here Is (Reprise)* by Marc JORDAN and Margaret COLEMAN
- *Small Talk* by Hal LINDEN and Barbara McNAIR
- *There Once Was a Man* by Hal LINDEN and Barbara McNAIR
- *Hey There (Reprise)* by Hal LINDEN

Act II

- *Steam Heat* by Sharron MILLER, David KRESSER, Jr. and P.J. BENJAMIN
- *Watch Your Heart* by Barbara McNAIR
- ***Think of the Time I Save* by Cab Calloway and Girls**
- *Hernando's Hideway* by Hal LINDEN, Sharron MILLER and Company
- *7 1/2 Cents* by Barbara McNAIR, Marc JORDAN and Girls and Boys
- *There One Was a Man (Reprise)* by Hal LINDEN and Barbara McNAIR
- ***The Pajama Game* by the entire Company**

“The Pajama Game” (1973-1974): tops and bottoms in black and white

A recording of the revival was apparently never considered, but CBS coincidentally reissued the original 1954 Broadway recording in October 1973.



The Pajama Game seen by NORKIN (NY Daily News)

“The Pajama Game” (1973-1974): tops and bottoms in black and white

CHRONOLOGY

1954, May 13

The Pajama Game opens on Broadway, St. James Theatre, New York, NY (will run for 1,063 performances).

1957, August 29

The Pajama Game (movie) is released in US.

1973, September 5

First announcement by producers Richard Adler and Bert Wood about the casting for a revival on Broadway

1973, October

??-24 ca – Rehearsals, Riverside Plaza Hotel, New York, NY

25 (8 pm)-26 (8 pm)-27 (2 pm) – Special preview performances, Opera House, Kennedy Center, Washington, DC

27-November 17 (8 pm + 2 pm on Wednesdays and Saturdays) – 3-week Tryout performances, Opera House (2,300 seats), Kennedy Center, Washington, DC

1973, November

4 or 5 – Cab named “Entertainer of the Year” by the Troupers, Friars Club, New York, NY

19-December 1 or 3 – Tryout performances, O’Keefe Centre (3,155 seats), Toronto, ONT, CANADA

1973, December

5 (2 pm, 8 pm) 6, 7, 8 (8 pm), 9 (2 pm) – Preview performances, Lunt-Fontanne Theater (1,500 seats), New York, NY

9 (7:30 pm) – Opening, Lunt-Fontanne Theater (Tuesday-Saturday: 7:30 pm; Matinees Wednesday and Saturday: 2 pm; Sunday: 3 pm), New York, NY

16 – Cab’s daughter Cabella Calloway marries Andrew Langsam in White Plains, NY

20 – Cab attends Chris and Cecelia Calloway’s opening engagement, Chris Cody’s, New York, NY

21 (afternoon) – Benefit appearance for the Citizen Committee for the Children of New York, with Cab, Barbara McNair and Richard Adler, Duffy Square, New York, NY

25 (after matinee show) – The cast sings “Happy Birthday” to Cab Calloway (66) in front of the curtain, Lunt-Fontanne Theater, New York, NY

1974, January

12 (11 am) – Cab with Chris Calloway, “A Saturday Happening”, F.A.O. Schwartz, New York, NY

14 (afternoon) – Shooting of “The Mike Douglas Show” Cab as a surprise guest with Barbara Mc Nair (aired January 16), Philadelphia, PA

“The Pajama Game” (1973-1974): tops and bottoms in black and white

19 – Closing notice posted for “The Pajama Game”, Lunt-Fontanne Theater, New York, NY

20 (afternoon) – Supposed to be last performance until Cab pledges \$50,000 (and declares to work for nothing) toward the new operating expenses, Lunt-Fontanne Theater, New York, NY

22 – *The Pajama Game* reopens, Lunt-Fontanne Theater, New York, NY

24 (5:30-6:30 pm) – with Barbara McNair and Hal Linden, Cab presides over “Once-a-Year-Day June-in-January Picnic Festival”, outside Lunt-Fontanne Theater, New York, NY

1974, February 3

Final performance, Lunt-Fontanne Theater, New York, NY

“The Pajama Game” (1973-1974): tops and bottoms in black and white



The Pajama Game seen by K Vey (The Record, NJ)

“The Pajama Game” (1973-1974): tops and bottoms in black and white

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[The Pajama Game will be performed in Lyon, FRANCE in December 2019](#)

Many thanks to Sharron MILLER.

*My deepest thanks and gratitude to **Keller WHALEN** who interviewed her and who helped me at every step of this article and beyond.*

A Special Thank You to all who contributed to this article.

Sincerely, John Thomas

Barbara always believed “The Truth Will Prevail – Good or Bad” ...