

'Main Street' Radio Show Mines Broadway's Intricacies

BY MICHELLE TRAURING

The title of WPPB's newest weekly radio show is one that host Laurence Maslon says he takes very seriously: "Broadway to Main Street."

But for a show that focuses on the world of Broadway, listeners will very rarely hear a musical's cast album, Mr. Maslon promises. This is simply not that kind of program.

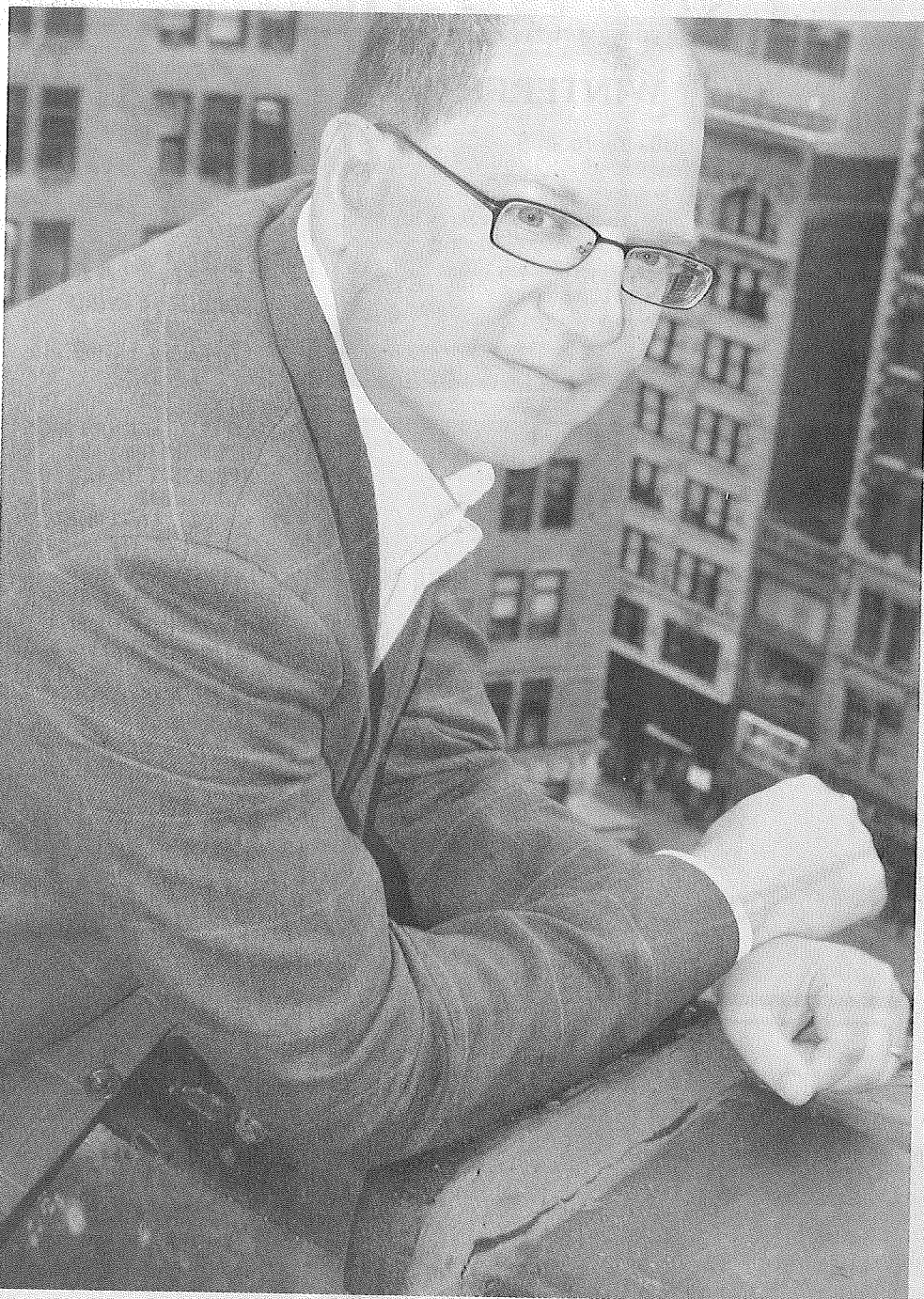
"I've always been an activist for the fact that Broadway music and the Broadway musical has filtered into pop culture in ways that people don't recognize," he said during a telephone interview last week. "I don't want to be ghettoized by playing cast albums. I want to show how vast and deep-reaching Broadway music actually is."

The hour-long program is devoted to music that began on the Broadway stage and reaches far off of it, expanding into pop, jazz, film and cabaret. Each broadcast of "Broadway to Main Street," which debuted on January 8 and airs every Sunday afternoon from 3 to 4 p.m., will focus on an individual show, songwriter or an overall historical or cultural movement, Mr. Maslon said.

Almost all of the program's material will come from Mr. Maslon's personal collection—one that he's been building since 1965, he reported.

"I've been diligently digitizing my LPs to play them on the air," the Southold part-timer said. "Listeners will get to hear a little snap, crackle and pop."

The show's ratio is 45 minutes of music to 15 minutes of commentary by Mr. Maslon. He added that he is hoping to have



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Laurence Maslon is the host of "Broadway to Main Street."

COURTESY LAURENCE MASLON

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surprise guests once the summer months arrive and activity at the Bay Street Theatre and Guild Hall pick up, he said.

The program follows in the tracks of "American Musical Theater," which was hosted by the late Lee Davis. But the new show will move in a slightly different direction, with a spin that the host said he hopes will draw in a new audience.

"There will be some people who go, 'It's not the show it was,' and be happy about it, and some people won't be happy about it," Mr. Maslon said. "But this is about what's vital and happening on Broadway, and bringing it to Main Street. More contemporary, more eclectic, more formatted."

On Sunday, January 22, Mr. Maslon's show will focus on the Broadway musical "Follies"—the winner of seven Tony Awards, which happens to be meeting its final curtain on the same day. Additionally, the program will air music dating from 1919 to 2011, he explained.

As it turns out, the man behind the music and lyrics for "Follies," Stephen Sondheim, imitated the style of particular composers of the early 20th century, creating pastiche numbers—or generally light-hearted, tongue-in-cheek imitations, according to Mr. Maslon. The radio host said he plans to juxtapose those songs by playing them back to back.

"I want to show the creative tension there," he said. "Radio is such a great medium to really throw some stuff together and create real sparks. That's what I'm really excited about. And show music. More than anything."

The musical bug first bit Mr. Maslon—who is now a Broadway historian and associate arts professor at New York University's graduate acting program—in 1969 when he was taken to see the Broadway musical "1776," which was based on the events surrounding the signing of the

Declaration of Independence.

"I just thought, 'Where has this been all my life?'" he recalled. "I was only 9. A friend of mine says that the first show you see marks you for life. For years, I didn't know why there were chorus girls in other musicals. I thought it should be guys in wigs singing about the Constitution."

Mr. Maslon has since figured it out. He's seen hundreds of plays on the Broadway stage and sat on the nominating committee for the Tony Awards from 2007 to 2010. He calls Broadway's history an "alignment of the stars."

Since the 1700s, theater had been all over Manhattan, but in 1904, when the subway line was put in, everyone around the city could come to one place for musical entertainment: Times Square, he reported. At that time, there were only a handful of theaters north of 42nd Street.

"When you could get there and people realized there was accessible real estate, the number of theaters doubled between 1904 and 1914, and tripled between 1914 and 1928," he said. "By then, there were 75 theaters."

Broadway has always reflected and refracted American taste, according to Mr. Maslon. It is a lot less evolutionary than people think. Rather than changing, the productions just reinvent themselves, he said. At the end of the day, Broadway is the same as it's ever been: performers singing and dancing on stage.

And while Mr. Maslon may never play an entire cast album on his radio show, he said that he's positive that he'll deliver the Broadway essence to listeners. However, he's considering breaking his rule on July 4th.

"I may have to play the '1776' cast album," he said. "I have a lot of time to worry about it."

"Broadway to Main Street" with Laurence Maslon will air every Sunday afternoon from 3 to 4 p.m. on WPPB 88.3 FM. For more information, visit peconicpublicbroadcasting.org.