

Little Girl Blue

Written by bluesever

Friday, 01 December 2017 18:10 - Last Updated Friday, 01 December 2017 18:14

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The Hippodrome was a gigantic theater which opened in New York in 1905 as a venue for larger than life productions. It was the flamboyant producer/impresario Billy Rose who conceived of a spectacle--part Broadway comedy, part circus, part carnival--to fill the Hippodrome. It was the most expensive production that Broadway had ever seen. He signed composer Richard Rodgers and lyricist Lorenz Hart to create the score for "Jumbo." The story concerned the rivalry of two circus owners whose respective daughter and son fall in love. Jimmy Durante played the role of the agent for the circus elephant, and the show opened with orchestra leader Paul Whiteman riding in on the elephant named Jumbo.

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Gloria Grafton as Mickey Considine, the daughter of one of the circus owners, introduced "Little Girl Blue," one of three popular songs from the show which included "My Romance" and "The Most Beautiful Girl in the World." Grafton sang "Little Girl Blue" at the end of Act 1 in a blue-lit dream sequence where she imagines she is a child being entertained by a circus. About the first half of the song is an instrumental run through of the melody and her vocal portion of the song lasts just over a minute.



Hippodrome, NYC

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„**Little Girl Blue**” is a simple, evocative Rodgers and Hart ballad that is intoxicating all the same. Lorenz Hart builds his lyric easily and smoothly, but the effect is powerfull:

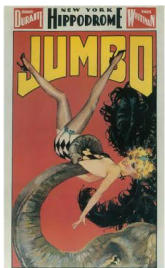
'count on your fingers, count the raindrops, but don't count your love.'

Rodgers' melody sticks to a narrow range, returning to a haunting three-note combination, and then move into circus-like waltz in the patter section.



Gloria Grafton

The song eventually caught on, but not at first because Rose insisted they not be played outside the theater, lest audiences lose interest. That perhaps explains why Margaret Whiting's version of "Little Girl Blue" didn't chart until 1947 and played for only one week, topping at #25. It was left to vocalist and pianist Nina Simone to refocus attention on the song which became a signature tune for her in 1958 when she released her debut album entitled Little Girl Blue.



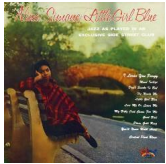
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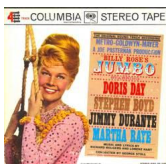
"Jumbo", poster 1935

In the hands of Simone, a classically trained pianist, it is transformed into a quodlibet – a song that uses a combination of melodies from different tunes. In this instance, Simone uses the Christmas carol “Good King Wenceslas” as the intro. It sounds like Lena Horne's 1945-ish recording was the main influence for Nina's recording.



Nina Simone - Little Girl Blue, Lp 1958

In 1962, 27 years after the musical played in NYC, “Jumbo” was made into a film starring Doris Day, Martha Raye, Stephen Boyd and - just as in the 1935 musical - Jimmy Durante. Doris sang “Little Girl Blue” and it was her last film musical.



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"Jumbo" Soundtrack, 1962

People may be most familiar with this song as recorded by Janis Joplin in 1969. Her recording was inspired by Nina Simone as she often introduced the song during performances as being a *'Nina Simone song'*.

Janis altered the lyrics a bit and did a very soulful rendering and since then singers either do a "Janis" version or the original.



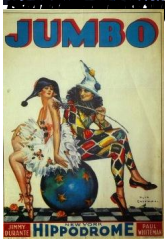
Janis Joplin - "Little Girl Blue" (frame from a documentary film)

"Jumbo", the last to play the Hippodrome, opened in 1935 and ran for 253 performances. The giant theater, across the street from the Algonquin Hotel, was destroyed and replaced by a garage. Even though the show lost money because of its exorbitant cost, it enhanced the reputation of Billy Rose and marked a triumphant return to Broadway for Rodgers and Hart who had not completely enjoyed their stint in Hollywood. The relationship of the two men was continuously strained--Rodgers the sober, reliable one and Hart the neurotic alcoholic who would periodically drop out of sight. However, together they produced a startling number of hit songs which have maintained popularity for generations.

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