

Merrily We Roll Along

Emerson Stage

Preliminary Director's Notes – REVISED/FINAL

Late Summer, 2014

Action of the Play: "Better go and grab it."

Theme Line: "Nothing wrong with wanting." (i.e. the show is about selfishness/I can't give you what you need).

Secondary Theme Lines: "Taking dreams, readjusting them;" (adapt and survive) "But old friends shouldn't compete."

My personal connection/additional thought: "You pour yourself into your work to cover your personal dysfunction" – Bruce Springsteen

The title: Ironic – Instead of an idyllic future, we're rolling into a reality of selfishness and Darwin: don't get in the way of me or my "things." And there are ramifications. Seeing this hell backwards will hopefully resonate with the audience in some way – the last thing we see is what we want to be or what we think we are. The last lines in the show are "me and you." Then we realize....

Sensorial Elements From The Text: soft, bumpy, rough, rain, shine, wine, coffee, darkness, dawn, iodine, vodka, buzz, water, red, smoky, cold, champagne, hues of anemones, tan, sun, blue, applause, flash, bam, dirt, heat, clanging, shivers. Recurring image of "countryside" is more metaphorical to me than literal = "outside of NY" – California coast, the dawn, "out there" space with Sputnik, the ideal future with a picket fence etc.

Preliminary Production Thoughts: **Ensemble/Chorus** - commenting on action with attitude, getting involved/connecting with the principals, liaison between audience and stage, doubling into minor roles, they don't age as the principals do – they're us/now? **Projections** = titles/year of scenes, big retrospective montage/collage sequence during prologue of principals' career and headlines from the 50's, 60's and 70's, possible scenic elements projected as well? **Automation** - piano & bench unit could move magically? - Palette? Could this palette move u.s. and d.s. as well as straight across stage to vary ground plans? Could the piano change orientation sometimes on its palette? Should we start looking for a gutted piano to lessen weight? Would be great if keys could depress and return as well to help with credibility of Frank playing. **Casting** - Men – 3 Principals, 8 Ensemble/doubles; Women – 3 principals, 10 Ensemble/doubles = 24 total (cutting Spencers and young Frank). **Sound** - recorded applause in II.1, three short v.o.'s to record for I.2 and I.4, all cast members mic'd and one spare/back up required, "Sinatra" singing may be substituted for a "new up and comer singer" i.e. someone from the Ensemble recorded for I.2. **Ends/Beginnings of Acts** – I have very specific ideas for staging/story-telling that will dictate some particular requirements in terms of design. I'll walk through these details to clarify in an early meeting with the entire design team. **Convention of direct audience address** - throughout the lyrics, there will be specific direct address to the audience, primarily from the Ensemble, but occasionally with the principals (especially Mary) as well. This hopefully will achieve clarity between the character inter-relationships vs. emotional aspects of those relationships that are meant to resonate (and be communicated) immediately with the audience to help move the story along. Many times, the direct address will be lyrics that have some kind of musical or grammatical repeated quality that ramps up the stakes. **Choreography** – Biggest/Bway style = top of II (Gussie and a couple boys), Smaller/simpler/few steps = "Old Friends," Act I Finale, "Bobby/Jackie/Jack." Possible movement/style = "That Frank," "Blob."

Preliminary Script and Casting Thoughts: I **believe skilled college-age actors** are the ideal casting for the show. Can we please seek permission for the following: Cut **Frank Jr** – casting practicalities? Frank Jr. can appear as infant/prop in I.4 – means he was born in 1967. We can play with implications of the pregnancy in the II club scene. Cut **Spencers/Beth's parents**. Again, casting practicalities and inconsistencies: unlike others in the show they don't age backwards noticeably and emotional function for the show is too literal. Cut **Iodine in the eyes** in I.1 - too violent/distracting, will be replaced with a middle finger bit or something. These are not thematic or interpretive changes being asked for – they are for casting practicalities and toning down a violent event. Therefore, this involves cuts in the book only.