Mary Poppins

Musical Based on the Stories of P. L. Travers and the Walt Disney Film

Original Music and Lyrics by Richard M. Sherman and Robert B. Sherman¹

Book by Julian Fellowes²

New Songs and Additional Music and Lyrics by George Stiles and Anthony Drewe

¹ The Sherman brothers won 1965 Academy Awards for “Best Original Song” (‘Chim Chim Cheree’) and “Best Original Score” for their work on Mary Poppins.

² Fellowes won an Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay, 2002 (Robert Altman’s Gosford Park) and is the creator of Downton Abbey.
The musical *Mary Poppins* is based upon Pamela Lyndon Travers’s 1934 book for children (and its seven sequels: *Mary Poppins Comes Back*, 1935; *Mary Poppins Opens the Door*, 1943; *Mary Poppins in the Park*, 1952; *Mary Poppins From A to Z*, 1962; *Mary Poppins in the Kitchen*, 1975; *Mary Poppins in Cherry Tree Lane*, 1982; and *Mary Poppins and the House Next Door*, 1988), as well as Walt Disney’s 1964 film.

P. L. Travers was the pen name for Helen Lyndon Goff, who was also an actress and journalist. Goff was born in 1899 in Australia. She toured Australia and New Zealand as a Shakespearean actress, then left for England in 1924. She never married, though she adopted a son when she was in her late 30s. She was the recipient of the Order of the British Empire in 1977, and died in London in 1996.

The brothers Sherman were sons of Al Sherman, who was also a songwriter. They became staff writers for Disney, including their famous “It’s a Small World, After All” for the 1964 World’s Fair in New York City.

The 1964 Disney movie came about only because Walt Disney attempted negotiations with Travers for approximately 20 years before finally obtaining her permission to produce a film version. Even then, Travers retained the rights to final script approval. The film has enjoyed immense critical and commercial success, perhaps more so than any other Disney production, with five Academy Awards and two Grammies. Julie Andrews won the Oscar for “Best Actress,” along with the Golden Globe and the New York Film Critics Circle Award in that same category. Author Travers was less impressed, opposing the lightened tone and animation of the film.

In 1993, Travers sold the stage rights to Sir Cameron Mackintosh, who is also associated with *Les Miserables, The Phantom of the Opera, Oliver!, Miss Saigon*, and *Cats*. 

On November 16, 2006, Mary Poppins premiered at The New Amsterdam Theatre on Broadway. This production closed on March 3, 2013 after 2,619 performances. The Broadway production garnered a Tony Award in 2007: “Best Scenic Design,” Bob Crowley, as well as two

A national tour for the United States began in Chicago, Illinois in March 2009 and concluded in June 2013 in Anchorage, Alaska. Foreign language productions have occurred in Sweden, the Netherlands, Finland, Denmark, Hungary, Czech Republic, Estonia, Mexico, Iceland, and Austria.
### Differences between the film and the musical:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>1964 Disney Film</th>
<th>Musical Stage Adaptation (somewhat closer to original book)</th>
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<td></td>
<td>More emphasis upon mischievousness of the children³</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Greater emphasis upon the dysfunctionality of the parents</td>
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<td>Adds the song ‘Playing the Game’</td>
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<td>Dancing penguins</td>
<td>Dancing statues</td>
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<td>The song ‘Let’s Go Fly a Kite’ is the finale</td>
<td>‘Let’s Fly a Kite’ moves to Act II</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lighter in tone⁴</td>
<td>Harsher in tone, particularly the Mary Poppins character⁵</td>
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<tr>
<td>Has no villains</td>
<td>“Miss Andrews” = father’s hard-hearted former nanny⁶</td>
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<td>Mother is a suffragette</td>
<td>Mother is a retired actress</td>
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<td>Set in 1910, last year of Edward VII’s reign</td>
<td>Set in 1930s (Great Depression), similar to Travers’s book</td>
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<td>Contains famous tea party on the ceiling</td>
<td>Eliminated</td>
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³ “For instance, young Jane and Michael Banks are not the sugary-sweet innocents that their press agents would have us believe. This little Master and Miss throw eardrum-shattering temper tantrums, tear the arm off a stuffed doll, and are so thoroughly obnoxious that their toys revolt.” “Making Mary Poppins: With upside-down dancing and more family drama, play stands apart from classic film,” Mary Carole McCauley. *Baltimore Sun*, 8 July 2010.


⁵ “Yes, the "Mary Poppins" that opened on Broadway last week is not nearly as sunny and sweet as the Disney film. But it’s a lot more interesting. The world’s most iconic nanny turns out to be a resilient figure, one who adapts neatly to cultural expectations. Travers’s original Mary Poppins—eccentric and ornery but with a deep, omnipotent goodness that her charges loved—seemed to stem from the writer’s own bereft childhood.” “There’s Something About Mary; A new Broadway musical shows the dark side of our favorite nanny, and sheds light on us.” Cathleen McGuigan, *Newsweek* 148.20 (November 27, 2006), page 54.

⁶ The patriarch in the musical, the workaholic Mr. George Banks, has experienced a very difficult childhood, which affects his relationship with his own children: “The musical, for example, more clearly charts the path of an unhappy family and even has a villain of sorts, a cruel nanny who mistreated the show’s father when he was a child.” Weekend Journal; Behind the Scenes: Julian Fellowes, Book Writer, ‘Mary Poppins,’ Robert J. Hughes, *Wall Street Journal*, August 25, 2006, p. 7.
Further Reading:


Pacific Conservatory Theatre, PCPA. [http://www.pcpa.org/plays/plays/marypoppins.html](http://www.pcpa.org/plays/plays/marypoppins.html)


