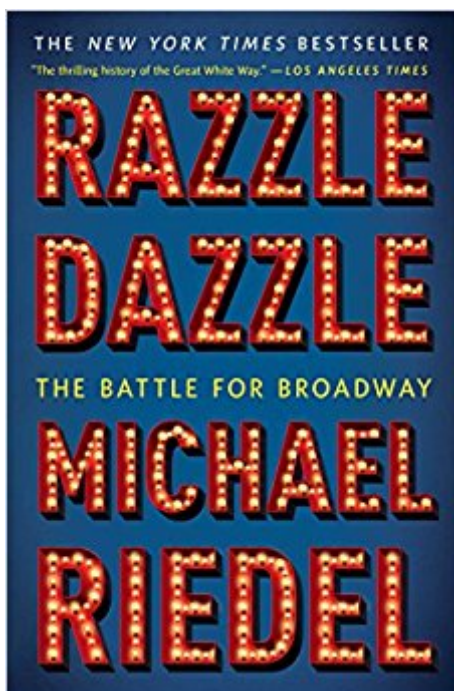


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# Razzle Dazzle: The Battle For Broadway



## Synopsis

The story of the rise, fall, and redemption of Broadway—its stars, its biggest shows, its producers, and all the drama, intrigue, and power plays that happened behind the scenes—unfolds faster than a curtain going up on opening night. A must read (Kevin Spacey). “A rich, lovely, debut history of New York theater in the 1970s and eighties” (Kirkus Reviews, starred review), *Razzle Dazzle* is a narrative account of the people and the money and the power that turned New York’s gritty back alleys and sex-shops into the glitzy, dazzling Great White Way. In the mid-1970s Times Square was the seedy symbol of New York’s economic decline. Its once shining star, the renowned Shubert Organization, was losing theaters to make way for parking lots and losing money. Bernard Jacobs and Jerry Schoenfeld, two ambitious board members, saw the crumbling company was ripe for takeover and staged a coup and staved off corporate intrigue, personal betrayals and criminal investigations. Once Jacobs and Schoenfeld solidified their power, they turned a collapsed theater-owning holding company into one of the most successful entertainment empires in the world, spearheading the revitalization of Broadway and the renewal of Times Square. “For those interested in the business behind the greasepaint, at a riveting time in Broadway and New York’s history, this is the ticket” (USA TODAY). Michael Riedel tells the stories of the Shubert Organization and the shows that re-built a city in grand style—including *Cats*, *A Chorus Line*, and *Mamma Mia!*—revealing the backstage drama that often rivaled what transpired onstage, exposing bitter rivalries, unlikely alliances, and inside gossip. “The trouble with *Razzle Dazzle* is you can’t put the damn thing down” (Huffington Post).

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"This book is a love letter to Broadway, both a splendid history of this American institution and a wonderful account of how art gets made. It made me fall for Broadway's magic all over again: its history and its myths, its heroes and its villains, its up and its downs, its dirt and its dish, its failure and its glory." (Hugh Jackman)

"There have only been a handful of books in history that have come close to accurately depicting the energy and drive that run the business of Broadway. Michael Riedel's Razzle Dazzle joins that very short list that includes William Goldman's legendary *The Season* and Richard Maney's classic *Fanfare* and is every bit the equal of those books that those of us who love Broadway can recite by heart." (Scott Rudin)

"Razzle Dazzle is a fantastically fun book, full of high energy, anecdotes, and wit. Michael Riedel lays bare the secret history of Broadway in all its grease paint, shady dealings, and shining moments. Written with love but also a piercing eye, this is one show no one should miss." (Amanda Foreman)

"If you've ever wondered how Times Square got its name, how the great New York theatres were built and who they were named after; or how on Broadway the word 'ice' can also mean corruption, Michael Riedel's revealing book on the history of the Great White Way will be a brilliant gift for any reader. It's an epic and entertaining study of the stage and the impresarios and artists who became not just legends but very wealthy ones at that. And while there may still be some 'ice' melting on the streets of mid-town, Riedel shows us that what the scalpers, producers and bookies, in and around Shubert Alley, were doing with kickbacks and bribes, makes the moral decay in Washington look like a badly run lemonade stand. Riedel's journey unfolds faster than a curtain going up on opening night; and his nimble choreography with language brings a full understanding and appreciation of how the artistry, decisions, and backstage shenanigans made these men and women of Broadway titans of the American theater. A must read." (Kevin Spacey)

Riedel brings enthusiasm and authority to this rich, lively debut history of New York theater in the 1970s and '80s. Riedel masterfully builds suspense as he chronicles productions from idea to stage to reviews to Tony Awards. A captivating gift to theater lovers. (Kirkus (starred)) "Riedel may be known, where he is known, for his sharp wit and sharper tongue, but when it comes to Broadway as an institution, as a history, and as a legend, he's very much a man in love." (Booklist)

"Just finished

RAZZLE DAZZLE, a vivid page-turner that's basically a history of Broadway by longtime theater observer Michael Riedel. It starts with a ticket-scalping scandal that practically brought down the industry, then flashes back to the sharp-elbowed early days of the Shubert empire, and then fills in with anecdotes both well-known (to aficionados) and long-forgotten (by nearly everyone). Startling deaths, unexpected demolitions, backstage gossip, inside stories are every bit as theatrical as its subject matter. (Bob Mondello, NPR) "Michael Riedel's new book, Razzle Dazzle, brings this gritty world [of 1970's and 80's Broadway] back to life.... Riedel unearths treasures from the recent past and contextualizes events that would otherwise be too easily forgotten." (The Washington Post) "The trouble with Razzle Dazzle, Michael Riedel's new book about Broadway, is that from the first page -- on which a man complains to the attorney general's office that "I made an investment in a play, and the producer used the money to buy a lobster boat in Montauk" -- you can't put the damn thing down.... Riedel subtitles his book "The Battle for Broadway," and he follows through by giving us a fascinating, eye-popping view of all the bloody carnage." (Steven Suskin Huffington Post) "Razzle Dazzle: The Battle for Broadway by Michael Riedel, the New York Post's flamboyantly mischievous Broadway columnist, tells the thrilling history of the larger-than-life impresarios who helped transform the Great White Way from cultural ugly duckling in the seedy 1970s to the grand billion-dollar swan it is today." (Los Angeles Times)

Michael Riedel has been a theater columnist for the New York Post since 1998. He worked at the Daily News (New York) for five years before returning to the Post and has written for The Guardian, Harper's Bazaar, Mirabella, Departures, and Commentary. Riedel is the cohost of Theater Talk with PBS, is a contributor to the BBC, and has appeared on Larry King Live, the Today show, Good Morning America, and many other news programs. He lives in New York City.

I and my entire family have been vitally interested and concerned with the Broadway stage for over a half century. My wife and I attended the old Schubert theater in New Haven, where numerous Broadway shows were put together before going to Broadway; the Goodspeed Opera House, where various original musicals were created; and Broadway itself. Our interest in Broadway has been a lifelong love affair. Michael Riedel in writing Razzle Dazzle: The Battle for Broadway has put together a truly masterful history of the Broadway stage and, indeed, Broadway itself. The book is extremely well researched and well written. Since the author has chosen to select specific topics to

be covered in various chapters individuals may appear in different chapters dealing with different topics. This is not a fault of the writing, but an effort to report completely all of the relevant material on a particular topic in a given chapter. Overall the author did a wonderful job of accurately describing all aspects of the history of the Broadway scene from early times to the current era as well as the personal lives of many of the Broadway greats involved. I had the good fortune of reading the book partly and listening to part via Audible.com. I thoroughly enjoyed doing both and found the book wonderful to read and the audio part to which I listened equally delightful. I recommend the book most highly. Nate Lerner

This was an excellent book. I loved it. When I was a child my parents would frequent the theater and I remember flipping through the playbills of the shows they saw. I've been interested in Broadway since I was 7. I loved reading about the shows my parents saw when I was young and then learning the behind the scene deals that went on regarding the shows I've seen over the past 43 years. There was one down side to the book. One of my favorite musicals was Rent. Yes I am a rent head. In the book, there was a chapter devoted to the Aids epidemic and how it swept away so many great Broadway stars. In addition, there was a large junk of the book devoted to the theater rivalry between the Shubert Organization and the Nederlander Organization. The story of how rent came to be, the aids theme, and the fact that it played in a Nederlander theater would of made it an excellent chapter. For some reason the author chose not discuss it. I checked the index and there was 1 sentence in the entire book that mentioned Rent. Regardless, this is still a great book and worth reading whether you've been going to the theater your whole like or just starting to visit.

I first encountered Michael Riedel several years ago in his role as co-host of PBS's "Theater Talk." He struck me then and now as smart and possessed of a mordant wit that must come in handy in his "day job" of the New York Post's theater critic. Thus, when he described his then-new book, "Razzle Dazzle," I thought I'd give it a try. Though a hidebound "hard" History buff, it didn't take much for me to rationalize that this is, after all, cultural History, and the reading experience proved to be as pleasurable as any I've enjoyed in the recent past. I am not a theater maven, though my attendance record does reach back to an SRO viewing of the original production of "The Music Man" in, I believe, 1959. Over the ensuing years, I've completed the apparently obligatory triple-header viewing of

Phantom, an Oklahoma revival, the original Amadeus, enough productions of Cats to put me on the fence about felines, and many others. I cite this record only to suggest that if most New York theatergoers are like me, they are usually pretty damned impressed when proffered a first-rate production of either a worthwhile drama or musical. Indeed, likely very few have the occasion to give a thought to the blood, sweat and tears (to say nothing of money) that go into these little miracles of retail entertainment. Read this book and you won't have to conjure the difficulties for Riedel does an absolutely superb job of elucidating them for us. A biography of the Shubert brothers is a de facto biography of Broadway because they literally gave shape to the modern business of theater show business. Though all died prematurely, their legacy was carried on and enhanced by their designated successors, their attorneys, Bernie Jacobs and Jerry Schoenfeld. I know that sounds as if the book is a Harvard B-School case study, but that story is only the framework on which Riedel builds his engrossing account of the incredibly colorful and talented visionaries who fathered the modern Broadway musical, at least while its heyday lasted. From Merrick to Robbins to Bennett to Webber to Rice to Bernstein to Sondheim, there isn't a dull character among them (though a reader might conclude that knowing some of them well wasn't worth the price of familiarity). More striking, and more entertaining, to me was Riedel's descriptions of the almost invariably complex, convoluted and controversial genesis of the majority of our most treasured musical productions. One might conclude upon attendance that these gems sprang whole from the fertile brains of creative geniuses when, in fact, most were annealed on the unforgiving forge of bitter failures, infighting and unrelenting misgivings about eventual success. How close many came to never being at all is one of the most beguiling and piquant aspects of this fascinating work. Riedel self-effacingly admits he was unsure whether his daily newspaper production quota of a few hundred words really equipped him to produce a full-length book. His doubts were misplaced. Broadway is, after all, just make believe, and Riedel does a surpassingly wonderful job of demonstrating just how much one has to believe in order to make. The book is a pure delight which I guarantee will interest any reader interested in our cultural history. Just buy it; you won't be sorry.

"Razzle Dazzle" is to Broadway what "Ball Four" was to baseball--an inside look at all of the fascinating, often hilarious, and sometimes horrifying inner world of producing and directing theater

in New York City. I hesitated to read this at first, because I'm not a fan of its author, Michael Riedel, who tends to be too snarky and self-promotional for my taste in his New York Post column and local PBS "Theater Talk" program. But for an entertainment reporter who rarely does much real journalism in his regular column, he sure does put readers in the front row for an up-close and personal look at the personalities, scandals and triumphs of those inside and outside the theater community who made Broadway what it is today.

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