The Broadway Theatre League of Harlingen and Its Successors


6/21/59  The Broadway Theater League, a project of the Harlingen Junior Chamber of Commerce (Jaycees), announces a season offering four productions in an effort to expose local audiences to exciting Broadway productions. Charles Feldman is co-chairman of the League. His family owns a chain of alcoholic beverage retail stores in the Valley. For the 1959-60 season apparently only two works, both serious, are booked. They are "Odd Man In" and "Dark Angel".

"The Andersonville Trials", another serious drama is presented on 11/7/60. This is followed by lighter fair as the season continues. First, on 12/15/60, comes the musical "Fiorello" about the colorful New York City mayor, Fiorello Laguardia. On 2/2/61 "The Pleasure of His Company" is put on, and this is followed on 3/15/61 by "Once Upon a Mattress." Season tickets range in price from $8.00 to $17.00, depending upon the attractiveness of seating.

"Thurbers Carnival", light-hearted fare, is presented on 4/7/62. The following season sees "The Sound of Music" being performed on 1/28/63. This followed a special presentation by the radio commentator and raconteur, Paul Harvey. This took place 9/12/62 at the Casa de Sol.

In the 1963-64 season, the very popular musical "Camelot" is staged at a cost of $16,000. On 6/19/04 Henry Guettel Productions of New York confirmed the English musical "Oliver" for 1/8/65. This production is based on Charles Dicken's Oliver Twist. Jules Munshin took the lead role. The profits on Oliver were split with the first $3,500 going to the production company, the next $1,500 to the Jaycees, and the remainder being a 70-30 split between the producers and the Jaycees respectively.

An earlier production on 11/24/64 is to be "Never Too Late" starring Penny Singleton and Lyle Talbot. Miss Singleton is the Hollywood actress who, together with Arthur Lake, played in the movie series "Blondie" based on Cy Young's comic strip of the same name.

Tickets this season ranged from $2.00 to $5.95 for individual performances to $4.50 to $10.90 for both attractions.

Louis Armstrong was scheduled to perform 10/24/65. The 1965-66 season also saw the comedy "The Odd Couple" being performed on 1/25/66. Later either "Luv" or "Generation" was presented. In 1966 the League began working with American Theatre Productions, Inc. of New York City.

On 4/21/66 saw the performance by Victor Borge, world-renowned Danish comedian and pianist. The Performing Arts, Inc. of New York, Chicago, and elsewhere book him from Dancia Enterprises, Inc. His act required a Steinway piano, which had to be rented from Bledsoe Music of Corpus Christi and transported to and from Harlingen. This instrument
is valued at $7,355 and costs $100 to tune. Mr. Borge's fee was $3,000 against 65% of the total box office receipts less taxes. Potential gross was put at $10,100 for a potential seating of 2,026.

Other productions performed included "Barefoot in the Park", "Look Homeward Angel" and "Dark at the Top of the Stairs." Additional stars appearing here were Joan Blondell, Imogene Coca, Hal March, and Brian Donlevy.

The endeavor has its ups and downs. By the 1980s the C of C takes over the handling of this enterprise with the production of "Chorus Line" being its first show. After the revamping of the Municipal Auditorium in the 1990s, the City Parks Dept. assumes responsibilities for the booking and scheduling of productions. These are expanded to encompass productions suitable for children in addition to those presented for an adult audience.