

The **MUSIC** MAN

The Music Man, with book, music, and lyrics by Meredith Willson, premiered on Broadway in December of 1957. It ran for 1,375 performances and won five Tony Awards, including Best Musical. The show's success led to revivals, including a long-running 2000 Broadway revival, a popular 1962 film adaptation and a 2003 television adaptation.

The Plot

The plot concerns con man Harold Hill, who poses as a boys' band organizer and leader and sells band instruments and uniforms to naive Midwestern townsfolk, promising to train the members of the new band. Harold is no musician, however, and plans to skip town without giving any music lessons. Prim librarian and piano teacher Marian sees through him, but when Harold helps her younger brother overcome his lisp and social awkwardness, Marian begins to fall in love. Harold risks being caught to win her.

Meredith Willson

Willson was born May 18, 1902, in Mason City, Iowa, which inspired *The Music Man*'s setting of River City, Iowa. A flute and piccolo player, he attended the Julliard School in New York City and was a member of John Philip Sousa's band from 1921–1923. He also performed with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra under Arturo Toscanini from 1924–1929.



Characters

Many of the musical's characters are based on people that Willson observed in his hometown or in his travels.

Harold Hill – a con man and traveling salesman

Robert Preston (the original Harold Hill) claimed that he got the role...despite his limited singing range because, when he went to audition, they were having the men sing "Trouble". The producers felt it would be the most difficult song to sing, but with his acting background, it was the easiest for Preston.

Marian Paroo – the town librarian and part-time piano teacher

The character Marian Paroo was inspired by Marian Seeley of Provo, Utah, who met Willson during World War II, when Seeley was a medical records librarian.

Marcellus Washburn – Harold's old friend, no longer a con man, who now lives in River City

Mayor George Shinn – a pompous local politician; suspicious of Hill

Eulalie Mackecknie Shinn – the mayor's wife

Mrs. Paroo – Marian's Irish mother

Winthrop Paroo – Marian's shy, lisping brother

Reception

Though *West Side Story* had opened nearly three months earlier, *The Music Man* captured audiences, critics and five Tony Awards, including Best Musical. *The New York Times* theatre critic Brooks Atkinson wrote in his review "If Mark Twain could have collaborated with Vachel Lindsay, they might have devised a rhythmic lark like *The Music Man*, which is as American as apple pie and a Fourth of July oration.... *The Music Man* is a marvelous show, rooted in wholesome and comic tradition."

Adapted from *Wikipedia*

