# Inside
# ANYTHING GOES
# background and analysis by Scott Miller

Anything Goes is widely considered one of the great classics of the American musical theatre, and yet most people seeing it – and working on it – don't really understand what it is. For too long, it's been a staple of high school drama departments and community theatres, where this brilliant satire is treated like an embarrassment, like its script is nothing more than hobbled-together, low-brow humor, the service of great old songs and a boatload of tap dancing.

On the contrary, Anything Goes is a masterful mashup of musical comedy, gangster movie, screwball comedy, and social satire, because even in terms of form, anything goes. Its twin satirical targets remain as potent as ever, America's habit of turning religion into show business and criminals into celebrities. Notably, there are two "criminals" among the cast, Mooney and Billy, one masquerading as a preacher, the other a fake celebrity.

First opening in a time when John Dillinger, Bonnie & Clyde, Al Capone, speakeasy hostess Texas Guinan, and evangelists Aimee Semple McPherson and Billy Sunday were all big national celebrities, this was potent, pointed satire; and the show is just as subversive today. Anything Goes fearlessly rips open the American psyche and spills it all out onto the stage. And let's be honest, the American psyche hasn't changed that much since 1934.

Hear the Sweet Beat

It was a rough birth, but it's having a great, weird, long life.

In November 1934, Cole Porter's Anything Goes hit Broadway like a freight train, starring the powerhouse trio of Ethel Merman, William Gaxton, and the hilariously stoic, trembly-voiced comedian Victor Moore. It wasn't Porter's first show – he had already written scores for See America First (1916), Within the Quota (1923), Paris (1928), Wake Up and Dream (1929), The New Yorkers (1930), Gay Divorce (1932), and Nymph Errant (1933) – but Anything Goes was his best. So many of the songs would become American standards, and the show's success and popularity would never really diminish, particularly after the boost from the 1962 off Broadway revival.

Originally, the show was called Hard to Get, then Bon Voyage, written mainly by Guy Bolton, with jokes by P.G. Wodehouse (pronounced WOOD-house), and it told the wacky tale of a transatlantic crossing aboard a luxury liner,

a wedding to be stopped, a disgruntled screenwriter concocting wacky disruptions (including a fake bomb), various romantic obstacles, and of course, mismatched lovers. (The first script was not about a shipwreck as some history books claim.)

The first composer that producer Vinton Freedley envisioned for the project was Jerome Kern, but Kern worked only with Otto Harbach and Oscar Hammerstein II at that time, and he wasn't interested. Freedley also considered George Gershwin, who was enmeshed in the creation of Porgy and Bess. Next on Freedley's list was Cole Porter.

But then the real life shipwreck of the Morro Castle, killing 132 people, hit the headlines two days before the show went into rehearsal, and Freedley decided making a musical comedy about a fake bomb on board a luxury liner was no longer a good idea. So Freedley introduced the director, Howard Lindsay, to the columnist and press agent Russell Crouse and asked them to write a new book.

Lindsay and Crouse would go on to become one of the most successful writing teams in the American theatre, writing Life With Father and the scripts for Red, Hot, and Blue, Call Me Madam, and The Sound of Music, among other shows. Their 1945 play State of the Union won the Pulitzer Prize.

So the new bookwriters fashioned a new story around Porter's now completed score (maybe this is why the show has always been so easy to tinker with), reportedly retaining less than a dozen lines from the original script. This time, the story involved safer romantic hijinks aboard the same luxury liner. (The ship setting had to remain since sets were already built.) In this second version, the steamship S.S. American (as a proxy for America itself) functions like Shakespeare's woods, a place with no rules, where people find out who they really are and "correct" the mistakes they've made in the world of the City, a "free" place where lovers de-couple and re-couple.

The bad boy hero Billy Crocker was named for a college buddy of Porter's at Yale, who helped finance some of Porter's early shows. Moonface Martin, aka Reverend Dr. Moon, was originally named Moon Face Mooney, but during the Boston tryout, an ominous message was personally delivered to the theatre from an eccentric mobster in New Jersey who was not pleased to share his name with a musical comedy character.

Anything Goes ran 420 performances, the fourth longest run of the decade, and 261 performances in London in 1935. The New York Times called it "a thundering good show," and "hilarious and dynamic entertainment." The New York World-Telegram called it "a triumph," and said, "You just must see it." The Boston Post wrote, "It opened fast, it raced along; in liveliness and beauty, wit and humor, it weaved a spell of genuine enjoyment that far exceeds anything the stage has given us in many a season."

A film version was made in 1936, initially announced with Bing Crosby as Billy, Queenie Smith as Reno LaGrange

(!), and W.C. Fields as Moonface. When it was released, Merman was back in her role, with Crosby as Billy, and Charles Ruggles as Moonie. The film included six of Porter's songs and six songs by other writers. A shortened TV version was aired on NBC in 1954 with Merman, Frank Sinatra, and Bert Lahr, with some of the original score and other Porter songs added. A 1956 film version was made that had nothing to do with the show except the title and a few songs.

The show was revived off Broadway in 1962 with a revised script by Guy Bolton, moving the entire story onto the ship (cutting the opening bar scene), as well as cutting some lesser Porter songs, replacing them with better songs from other Porter scores. This third stage version ran 239 performances. Then it hit London again in 1969 but ran only 15 performances. The show returned to Broadway in 1987 for an impressive 804 performances, and London once more in 1989. The 1987 version sported a new script by John Weidman and Timothy Crouse (son of Lindsay Crouse), based on the original and restoring more of the original score, including some (less than stellar) previously cut songs. The show was revived again in London in 2002, directed by Trevor Nunn, and it returned to Broadway in 2011 in a version very close to the 1987 version.

Because of all these different versions of the show, there is no single definitive version. The 1934 script probably couldn't be produced today, and the 1934 score did have some less than brilliant songs. "Waltz Down the Aisle" doesn't even approach the skill of "I Get a Kick Out of You." So maybe it's better that Anything Goes has changed over time. People today see productions of the '62 revival, and they assume the score was always packed with all those hits, but it wasn't. The show we know today is superior to the original. "Friendship," "De-Lovely," "Let's Misbehave," "Take Me Back to Manhattan" – none of those songs were in the show originally.

But maybe a constantly shifting score is exactly right for a show called Anything Goes. We say it's a "classic," but really, it's the revival thirty years later that's the classic. Whatever its circuitous path to our stage, it's still a fierce satire that nails some of the crazier impulses in our culture today. And our culture in the 30s. And in the 60s, and 80s...

The Tinpantithesis

Musical theatre "purists" really like to have "definitive" texts for all the great musicals. Often that is represented by the first production of a show, but not always. Shows like The Music Man, Gypsy, Oklahoma!, West Side Story, and Fiddler on the Roof pretty much have their scripts and scores etched in stone. You don't fiddle with them.

But with other shows, like Show Boat, Cabaret, Hair, Pippin, and Anything Goes, there is no single definitive version. These shows have changed so much and so often, in foreign productions, tours, and revivals – even during their

original runs – that you can't really point to one version of any of these shows as canonical. Some might argue strenuously for the original Broadway productions of Cabaret, Grease, and Pippin, but the shows' authors would likely disagree.

These "evolving" shows, and Anything Goes in particular, bring to mind the game Exquisite Corpse (for which a song in Hedwig is named). According to Wikipedia:

> also known as exquisite cadaver (from the original French term cadavre exquis), is a method by which a collection of words or images is collectively assembled. Each collaborator adds to a composition in sequence, either by following a rule (e.g. "The adjective noun adverb verb the adjective noun." as in "The green duck sweetly sang the dreadful dirge.") or by being allowed to see only the end of what the previous person contributed.

The substantially rewritten, patchwork 1962 off Broadway revival is simply better musical theatre than the original. The 1987 revival is a bit closer to the original, and was weaker for it.

A stroll through the 1962 Anything Goes score is eye-opening...

The first song, "You're the Top," is in the original 1934 Anything Goes score, and set up pretty much the same way, but it's late in Act I, right before the finale. And "Bon Voyage" is in pretty much the same spot in every production (although the '87 revival added its counterpoint song, "There's No Cure Like Travel," which had been cut in '34)

The '62 version quotes instrumentally the sailor's chantey, "There Will Always Be a Lady Fair," but does not include the vocals from 1934 (and '87). The '87 production also stuck in "I Like to Row on the Crew," one of Porter's college songs from Yale.

But where the '62 version has "It's De-Lovely," with Billy and Hope on deck, the original version has them singing "All Through the Night." Though the two songs sort of accomplish the same thing, the tone couldn't be more different. Replacing the serious, aching emotion of "All Through the Night" with the smartass playfulness of "De-Lovely" is an interesting move. "It's De-Lovely" is actually from Porter's 1936 show Red, Hot, and Blue, featuring Ethel Merman as a hard-boiled manicurist (not kidding) named "Nails" O'Reilly Duquesne, singing to her square lawyer boyfriend Bob, played by Bob Hope. It was first written but not used, for the 1936 film Born to Dance.

It's interesting in the transfer from one show to the other, how the smartass, streetwise woman becomes the smartass, streetwise guy (Billy); and the innocent, "square" guy becomes the innocent, "square" woman (Hope).

Where the '62 version has Bonnie and the angels singing, "Heaven Hop," in 1934 the song "Where are the Men?"

was in that spot originally. “Heaven Hop” is actually from the 1928 Porter show Paris. It’s a more interesting song here, if for no other reason, the crazy mashing up of religion and pop culture in the lyric, perfect for Reno’s Angels. The song was added to Anything Goes in 1962 for dancer Margery Gray, who was playing Bonnie. It was originally staged by choreographer Ron Field on roller skates, but the raked stage proved a problem for the skates. No other versions of the show used this song.

“Friendship” is originally from the 1939 musical DuBarry Was a Lady. The original Anything Goes script has “You’re the Top” in this spot, with only Reno and Billy. In ‘62, Reno, Moonie, and Billy sing “Friendship;” but in the later revivals, only Reno and Moonie sing it.

The ‘62 version then moves “I Get a Kick Out of You,” from the beginning of the show to late Act I, Originally, Reno was singing about being in love with Billy; but in the ‘62 version, she’s singing about being in love with Sir Evelyn. That’s much more interesting and much more plot-driven. Porter first wrote this song for the 1931 musical Star Dust, which never even went into rehearsal. Most of that score is lost, but this song made it into Anything Goes.

Every version of the show ends the first act with “Anything Goes,” but the original also added a short dialogue scene after the song in which Hope walks out on Billy (which happens before the song in the other versions), and a short reprise of “You’re the Top.”

Both the original and the ‘62 version start Act II with “Public Enemy Number One,” although the original is much longer.

“Let’s Step Out” was added halfway through the original run of Porter’s Fifty Million Frenchmen, under the title, “Stepping Out.” This may have been just an attempt to juice the energy early in the second act. In the original, the audience had to wait fourteen pages to get to the second song of Act II. In the ‘62 version, there are two songs in that gap. The other is “Let’s Misbehave,” one of Porter’s real gems, which was also written for the 1928 musical Paris, but cut before opening. The song was sung by two characters who are actors, Vivienne Rolland and Guy Pennel, who’ve been working together but only now realize they are in love.

But then Porter wrote his huge hit, ”Let’s Do It,” and that replaced “Let’s Misbehave,” which then sat in a trunk till it was rescued in 1962.

“All Through the Night” in the ‘62 version is essentially where a reprise of “All Through the Night” was in 1934. Originally, it was followed by “Be Like the Bluebird”; in the revival it was preceded by “Be Like the Bluebird.”

Billy and Hope both sing “All Through the Night,” but almost entirely separate, not together; their union is not real yet,

it's in the future, so they can't musically "couple" by harmonizing yet. Then again, they do sing the last two lines together (in octaves), so there's still hope for them. In the original 1934 production, neither of them sang the last verse, which went to the men's chorus. The song's harmonic progression is fascinating, winding its way through various tonalities, until the home key is almost lost – like Billy and Hope's love. And almost the entire melody is in half-steps, slowly descending chromatically, working against the dreamy lyric, until the end of the main phrase suddenly leaps up with optimism. It's a beautiful sound picture.

The '62 revival fixed some real problem with pacing and narrative structure. In the original production, we took a break from plot at this point for Reno to sing "Buddie Beware," and for Hope to sing "The Gypsy in Me." But in the '87 revival, they gave "Buddie Beware" to Bonnie (oddly renamed Erma), and gave "The Gypsy in Me" to Sir Evelyn.

In the '62 version, this spot goes to Reno and the Angels for "Take Me Back to Manhattan," which is really from The New Yorkers (1930), Porter's very adult musical satire about a rich woman who falls in love with a bootlegger. "Take Me Back to Manhattan" was that show's full company finale.

Most of the versions of Anything Goes end with a short medley of "You're the Top" and "Anything Goes," though the 1934 script just has a stage direction saying they reprise "Anything Goes."

The '62 revival version didn't just add a bunch of Porter songs; it remade the score, cutting four songs from the original: "There Will Always Be a Lady Fair," "Where Are the Men?", "Buddie Beware," and "The Gypsy in Me." The 1987 revival put these last two back in, along with a song cut from the original, "Easy to Love," which was too rangy for the original Billy. The later revivals also added Porter's mediocre "Goodbye, Little Dream, Goodbye," first written for the movie Born to Dance but cut, then added and cut again from Red, Hot, and Blue, finally landing as the only song in Terrence Rattigan's London play, O Mistress Mine.

Cole Porter was as prolific as the Tin Pan Alley writers, but went beyond them in terms of originality and artistry – and sexuality. None of them could have written the epic, sprawling "Begin the Beguine," or lyrics as culturally insightful and acrobatic as "You're the Top." Irving Berlin was a great songwriter, but he didn't write more than a small handful of great theatre songs. Porter wrote a ton.

Arguably the reason Anything Goes has stayed so popular so long is the top-to-bottom rehab done to it off Broadway in 1962, when they sort of made the perfect Cole Porter musical.

I've Been a Sinner, I've Been a Scamp

A lot of musical theatre fans love Anything Goes, but consider it a guilty pleasure, the artsy equivalent of Mississippi mud cake, just a mindless, old-fashioned musical comedy confection. They register great surprise to hear it described as a sharp satire.

But it is.

Musical comedy had dealt in gentle social satire since the beginning, but Anything Goes was the first successful Broadway musical comedy to build its story on two parallel threads of fierce, pointed, cultural satire. This time the plot came out of the satirical agenda, rather than the satire being just a fun side joke. Anything Goes was a dead-on satirical chronicle of That Moment... which also happen to be This Moment.

Maybe we're just too used to Anything Goes at this point, to see it as it once was. But this is a show that includes a mock religious hymn to a (supposed) murderer, skeet shooting with a machine gun, a love song that mentions snorting coke, and a parody religious revival meeting featuring a song with a slyly sexual hook line. If you doubt the double entendre of "Blow Gabriel, Blow," this is the same songwriter who wrote in the title song, "If love affairs you like with young bears you like..." That meant then what it means today. And notice in the scene leading up to the song, most of the confessions are sexual. Reno is presented as an explicitly sexual presence from the beginning.

But Reno is also a religious figure, and in "Blow, Gabriel, Blow," she taps into the 1934 zeitgeist. During the Depression, many American believed that they were living through the "great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be." (Matthew 24:21) So riffing on that, Reno and her angels (we're probably supposed to assume this is one of their regular numbers) pray for the archangel to signal the end of the tribulations (Prohibition, the Depression) and announce with his trumpet the coming of Christ. Reno assures Gabriel she's ready to "trim [her] lamp," a Bible metaphor meaning she'll work at and maintain her faith (to keep oil lamps burning brightly and consistently, you have to trim the wick back), that she's mended her ways (we can only guess what those ways included), that now, "I'm good by day and I'm good by night." Of course, that line assumes that Reno hasn't always been "good by night."

But these "sinners" aren't asking for forgiveness or anything; they just want to "play all day in the Promised Land." It's a remarkably crass take on the Book of Revelation's thousand years of peace and righteousness. And all this to jazz music, until recently considered the devil's music...

In one section, they all chant:

Satan, you stay away from me,
'Cause you ain't the man I wanna see!
I'm gonna be good as the day I was born,

‘Cause I heard that man with the horn!
Do ya hear it?

Once you really pay attention to this lyric, you realize this section is all about the End Times. They want to be good, because Jesus and Judgment Day are coming soon!

One of the more subtle jokes in the show is in this song, when the women take the melody and the men sing “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” in counterpart, also a song about angels taking “me” to heaven. Since this is the male passengers and crew singing this counter-melody, are we to read that as spontaneous, that religious fervor is taking them over? Since this is always a big, involved, full-company, Broadway musical comedy dance number, it lays on top of our fake revival meeting an even more cynical layer of comment – religion is literally show business.

But there’s even more swimming around in Anything Goes. When the show opened in late 1934, Prohibition had ended just a year earlier, but the Depression rolled on, and the Dust Bowl kept destroying lives. The FBI was at the height of its notoriety, but the public loved some of the gangsters on the FBI’s Most Wanted list (which is the whole point of “Public Enemy Number One”). Importantly, the FBI – standing in for law and order in general – is not on board the S.S. American. In fact, they arrest the wrong guy at the beginning of the show, and leave the ship! They’re not up to the job. They can’t/won’t protect us. Was this a comment on how hard it was for law enforcement to catch America’s celebrity criminals, John Dillinger, Baby Face Nelson, Pretty Boy Floyd, Bonnie & Clyde, et al.?

On the other hand, we find out early in the show that the FBI has caught Snake Eyes Johnson, which is in tune with the fact that every celebrity criminal mentioned above was shot and killed in 1934, just before Anything Goes opened.

Here on the S.S. American, we are in Shakespeare’s metaphorical woods, away from laws and civilization, where two things will happen. First, love will get “fixed” as our characters de-couple from the wrong partners and re-couple with the right partners. Second, with lots of liquor and very little “law,” these passengers are free to act on their impulses, to chase after various forms of vice, to be their “natural” selves. And notice that the ship is called the “American” – this place of no rules and no law is 1930s America, where (until a year earlier) lots of Americans broke the law by drinking alcohol. When that many Americans broke the law, when they stopped believing in the institutions that failed them, America became functionally lawless.

By calling the ship the S.S. American, the show’s writers were underlining their social commentary. As a comic microcosm of our country, these passengers showcase the worst of the American inclination to make celebrities out of criminals and show biz out of religion, an inclination as prevalent today as it was in the thirties. But the satiric aim

is more pointed than just those two overarching themes. So what else does Anything Goes satirize? A lot.

Even though economists will tell you the 1929 stock market crash did not “cause” the Depression, it was still the starting pistol, and most people in 1934 believed rich Wall Street types were to blame. Notice that in Anything Goes we have two representatives of Wall Street – the drunken, horny, nearly blind Mr. Whitney, and the shit-disturbing rogue Billy Crocker. The name Crocker comes from the French for “heartbreak.” In this story Wall Street is decidedly undependable.

The real-life Richard Whitney had been the very famous president of the New York Stock Exchange and during the 1930s, he was famed for steering his clients through the treacherous waters of the Depression. But his success was a scam of the proportions of Enron and Bernie Madoff, and he was finally caught in 1938 when his firm collapsed. Still, as audiences watched Anything Goes in 1934, Whitney was the hero of the rich, so naming Billy’s boss Whitney – and making him a drunk – was a pretty subversive reference. According to Wikipedia:

> On October 24, 1929, Black Thursday, Whitney attempted to avert the Wall Street Crash of 1929. Alarmed by rapidly falling stock prices, several leading Wall Street bankers met to find a solution to the panic and chaos on the trading floor of the New York Stock Exchange. The meeting included Thomas W. Lamont, acting head of Morgan Bank; Albert Wiggin, head of the Chase National Bank; and Charles E. Mitchell, president of the National City Bank of New York. They chose Whitney, then vice president of the Exchange, to act on their behalf.

With the bankers’ financial resources behind him, Whitney went onto the floor of the Exchange and ostentatiously placed a bid to purchase a large block of shares in U.S. Steel at a price well above the current market. As traders watched, Whitney then placed similar bids on other “blue chip” stocks. This tactic was similar to a tactic that had ended the Panic of 1907, and succeeded in halting the slide that day. The Dow Jones Industrial Average recovered with a slight increase, closing with it down only 6.38 points for that day. In this case, however, the respite was only temporary; stocks subsequently collapsed catastrophically on Black Tuesday, October 29. Whitney’s actions gained him the sobriquet, “White Knight of Wall Street.”

The Harcourts (and Mrs. Wentworth, in the ‘34 version) stand in for America’s “cafe society,” the 1% of 1934. In the original version of the show, the Harcourts’ family business was in serious trouble and needed saving, which was the reason for the arranged marriage. Is it any wonder Billy and Hope both would like to escape this culture? According to an article on the PBS website:

> The Great Depression was partly caused by the great inequality between the rich who accounted for a third of all wealth and the poor who had no savings at all. As the economy worsened many lost their fortunes, and some members of high society were forced to curb their extravagant lifestyles.

But for others the Depression was simply an inconvenience especially in New York where the city's glamorous venues – places to see and be seen – such as El Morocco and The Stork Club were heaving with celebrities, socialites and aristocrats. For the vast majority the 1930s was a time of misery, but for many American dynastic families, parties helped to escape the reality on the street and the grander the better.

Parties and trans-Atlantic cruises.

Many stories of the Great Depression show us the shattered and disenfranchised turning to religion in their time of need. But church attendance grew during the Depression only about five percent. Notably, no one aboard the S.S. American in Anything Goes has that spiritual need, and so for these people religion becomes show business, entertainment, the latest fad. Though the content of "Blow, Gabriel, Blow" is basically reverent, the song's rowdy, fast, jazz music quickly and comically short-circuits any hint of real religion fervor. This is religion as drunken party.

The only genuine symbol of religion we see in the show is the comically clueless Bishop Dobson, who's banished from this community (i.e., mistakenly arrested) before the ship even sets sail; and all we're left with is the fake religion of fake-minister "Dr." Moon, and the gambling "Christian converts." Genuine religion (and conventional morality), the Baptist tent revivals and religious radio shows of the 1930s, are all missing from this place. Here there is no moral control – it's Shakespeare's woods.

In the 1930s, the 1960s, and also today, Dark Times bring forth the most pointed satire. Anything Goes opened halfway through the Depression, which also begat brilliant satires like Of Thee I Sing, Let 'Em Eat Cake, and The Cradle Will Rock.. The 1962 revival opened at the start of one of the most divided, angry decades in American history. The 1987 revival opened on the infamous Black Monday, the day the stock market crashed again.

None of the show's targets feel dated, because we're struggling with all the same things now. Still today, religion is often repackaged as slick, high-budget show biz. When America's evangelicals strongly support the womanizing vulgarian and sexual predator Donald Trump, religion in America is on life support. And still today, we make celebrities out of criminals, and depending where the various investigations lead, Trump may be the best illustration of that too.

Cole Porter's songs have all the bite, the sophistication, and the smartass humor of Ira Gershwin and Yip Harburg, but Porter's songs often bite a little harder, his lyrics closer to how people talk, instead of always just building toward a funny rhyme. Like those of the great George M. Cohan, Porter's lyrics sound like they could actually come out of the mouths of the characters. If his songs can often be transplanted from one show to another, that's only because many of his shows were about the same kind of people – smartass, subversive, sexual, clever, ironic, complicated, and contradictory. Just think for a second about all the characters in Anything Goes that have contradictory

impulses.

Porter wrote both in contemporary slang and in genuinely elevated, powerfully poetic language when the moment called for it. His songs can be emotionally shattering and they can be icily cynical, about the most intimate insecurities or the most macro satire. Porter and his co-writers were writing old-school musical comedy, but they were also chronicling our times – hen and now – most insightfully.

There's an Old Australian Bush Song

Almost every song in Cole Porter's Anything Goes score has a trick or a central joke to it.

Now to be fair, that's not true of every song in the original 1934 production, which included some very conventional musical comedy songs, among its sharp satire. But with the 1962 revival, its deletion of those more conventional songs and the addition of quite a few Porter songs from other musicals – the '62 revival essentially created a Porter "greatest hits" show, sort of like My One and Only. And with this new Frankenstein score, it really is true that almost every song brings some awesome surprises.

More so than most musicals, quite a few songs in Anything Goes (talking about the '62 version) are diegetic, meaning the act of singing is part of the action, and not just the language of the storytelling. In Anything Goes, the characters clearly know they're singing in "Blow, Gabriel, Blow" and "Public Enemy Number One," "Let's Step Out," and "Heaven Hop" (since they describe the dance in the lyric), "Be Like the Bluebird" ("an old Australian bush song" which Moon says he'll "render" for Billy); and arguably "You're the Top," "Friendship," and "Anything Goes." The only songs that are definitely not diegetic are "All Through the Night," "I Get a Kick Out of You," and maybe "De-Lovely." Certainly in "You're the Top," "Friendship," and "De-Lovely," they are at least joking and/or performing for each other, if not "singing."

There's so much to this score that people don't recognize...

"You're the Top" is one of the theatre's great list songs. Billy and Hope are ironically complimenting each other by comparing them to celebrities and trendy brand names – essentially turning Gandhi, Botticelli, and the Mona Lisa into consumer brands. And notice how often the lyric sets old European images (the Tower of Pisa) against the newest American images of the moment (cellophane), again a very subtle nod to the coming story, in which Hope has to choose between Old Europe (Evelyn) and up-to-date America (Billy).

More than anything, "You're the Top" is just a big goof, but one with a pretty sharp satiric edge. Though it's awfully

subtle, it lays down one of the two central themes of the show, our American obsession with celebrity and consumerism. It's almost a love song, but it comically filters that love through the ironic lens of materialism and celebrity worship: I love you because you're as wonderful as Ovaltine. And that irony supports the story here, since Reno has feelings for Billy, but Billy doesn't feel the same.

"It's De-Lovely" pokes fun at lyricists like Ira Gershwin and Yip Harburg, who made up crazy words in their lyrics, something Porter actually did a lot less. More often than not, when a Porter song does it, it's because the characters are "playing;" so the made-up words help define character and maybe story. Notice how organically the gimmick is used in this song – the first time, we hear two real words first ("it's delightful, it's delicious") and then the made-up word ("it's de-lovely"). The more we get into the song, the sillier the words get.

But Porter earns it all with his invention of the word tinpantithesis, in Hope's intro verse, a made-up word that towers above those of Gershwin and Harburg. Hope worries that her song/singing may be the opposite – the antithesis – of "melody," i.e., good music, pretty music. But it's not just the opposite, she's warning him; it's also kind of tacky and common. It's the Tin Pan Alley antithesis of good music, or in Porterspeak, the "Tinpantithesis." That's awfully good writing, and particularly fun in the middle of a song about making up words. Ultimately Hope decides the embarrassment is not worth it, and she'll "skip the damn thing and sing the refrain." But by the time she makes this decision, she has already finished the verse – about whether or not to sing the verse. That's incredibly "meta" for 1934 – she's literally singing about her singing.

But what many people miss is Hope is making a joke! Billy has been clowning around, and Hope decides to join the fun. It's the first time we see the "fun" Hope; and the first time we really see that there's a Carefree Hope that Billy rode around the park with all night, in contrast to the Respectable Hope who has accepted her obligations dutifully. Which Hope wins the tug-of-war will tell us who'll she marry. As if we don't already know.

Also interesting is the ethnic dialect humor, still part of American comedy in 1934 – "d'vallop" (the wallop, as in "it packs a wallop," i.e., a powerful effect), "de vinner" (the winner), "d'voiks" (the works, meaning "it's everything").

"Heaven Hop" makes fun of the pop songs that invented new dance "crazes" in the 20s and 30s, cataloging the moves in the lyrics. Even though this song isn't originally from Anything Goes, it fits surprisingly well here, since we have some angels hanging around.

"Friendship" is one of three songs in the show in which characters are just playing, and consciously trying to amuse – even crack up – their friends, alongside "You're the Top" and "It's De-Lovely." It's interesting that both Reno and Billy and are in two of those songs, and Billy is in all three; they are the "playful" characters, from whom the other characters have to learn about joy before our story ends.

“I Get a Kick Out of You” is much more intense than we usually recognize, maybe because we know it too well. But what’s the central point of this song? I don’t feel emotions and never have, but I’m starting to feel something for the first time. Literally “everything leaves me totally cold.” That’s quite an admission from the saucy, sassy, smartass speakeasy hostess. None of the usual thrills – alcohol, drugs, or adventure (flying in a plane) – can thrill her, only “you.” And then right before the final verse, we find out her love is not returned. Wow.

In the original version, Reno starts the show with this, and it’s about her feelings for Billy. In the revivals, this song comes along late in Act I, and now it’s about Reno’s feelings for Evelyn. It’s much stronger in terms of story structure when it comes later – here it reveals something we’re already suspecting, and it sets up one of the narrative threads that will get resolved in Act II.

Porter loved to use the latest slang, but interestingly, kick meaning “surge or fit of pleasure” (often as kicks) goes back only to 1941, though the related meaning; “stimulation from liquor or drugs” (the first two verses) goes back to 1844. Anything Goes opened in 1934. Did Porter put that later meaning into our language? Or are we reading that word differently than Porter meant it? Was he using that older meaning in a new way, suggesting that for Reno this feeling of love is a jolt of intoxication, not just a nice diversion...? Or does it feel that way to Reno because she’s never felt anything before...?

By the time we get to the end of the act and the title song, almost every character has been thrown for a loop. Almost every character’s world has been thrown out of balance. And everybody in the audience knows what that feels like. And then Reno says (sings) what we all know: Life is Fucking Crazy. Literally anything goes.

The title of the show and the Act I finale has gotten too familiar to us. The impact of the phrase, “Anything Goes,” has dulled over the years, maybe because it’s always associated with this “old musical.” But this lyric is incredibly well-crafted and tells us so much about that moment in our history, in the midst of great cultural changes. By the end of the song, we realize the title refers ironically both to the wild abandon of the 20s, and the unbelievable hardship and challenges of the 30s, yin and yang.

The end of the first act leaves us with a plot cliff-hanger (has Billy lost both hope and Hope?), a big, noisy, full-company dance number, but also a feeling of slight unease – our world really is that screwed up!

And then off you go to intermission..

“Public Enemy Number One,” a satiric hymn, starts Act II with what feels like a one-joke throwaway, but it’s not. This song is the convergence of the show’s two main themes – the way Americans turn religion into show business and

criminals into celebrities. In this song, they turn a (supposed) criminal into a celebrity, and then into a religious figure, in a satiric exaggeration of the public's love affair with real celebrity criminals of the 30s, like Bonnie & Clyde, John Dillinger, Baby Face Nelson, et al. The irony here is even thicker because the audience knows Billy isn't really a criminal – and inside the story, so do Moon, Bonnie, Reno, Hope, and the Angels.

It's also interesting to note that in 1934, the Anything Goes audience wasn't there to see if Billy and Hope got together in the end. They were there to see three top show biz celebrities, Ethel Merman, William Gaxton, and Victor Moore – and arguably by this point, Cole Porter himself was as big a celebrity. The audience was laughing at the onstage passengers being seduced by celebrity, but the audience had been seduced too...

Even the seemingly innocuous "Let's Step Out" has the twin agendas of commenting on Bonnie's "class" divide from the other passengers, as the moll of the country's most dangerous criminal; but she also rails against the gloom and seriousness of the Depression, after the wild years of the 1920s. It's weirdly synchronistic that the passengers sing the twisted, morally upside-down hymn "Public Enemy Number One" to Billy, believing him to be Bonnie's boyfriend – just before Bonnie herself enters and chides them for their pointless solemnity. Unlike most of the passengers, she gets how crazy all of this is. She also knows that with Snake Eyes in the care of the FBI, she's safe now – so why not party and flirt?

"Let's Misbehave," on the other hand, was a brilliant '62 interpolation. Evelyn didn't get a song in 1934, because he was more a device than a main character. In 1962, with more focus on the Evelyn-Reno romance, the two of them got "Let's Misbehave" in Act II, where Evelyn starts to cut loose for the first time in his life, which helps the audience root for this relationship. In the '87 revival, Evelyn got "The Gypsy in Me" instead, which had belonged to Hope in '34. And while "Gypsy" is a fun number for Evelyn, "Let's Misbehave" is much better at character, relationship, and plot advancement.

We don't just need to know Evelyn will loosen up; we need to know he's found his primal animal side ("we're merely mammals"), and also how perfectly he and Reno fit each other. Note that while Billy and Hope get songs about marriage ("De-Lovely") and chaste yearning ("All Through the Night"), Evelyn and Reno get a song about carnality. Evelyn doesn't invoke Romeo and Juliet, or Abelard and Heloise; no, he invokes Adam and Eve – lovers in a state of pure nature, before morality, before judgment, before clothing. We are indeed in Shakespeare's woods here, and Reno and Evelyn are de-coupling from the wrong partners and re-coupling here with the right partners.

That's why we're here, after all. It's sort of parallel to A Midsummer Night's Dream, if you think of the starry night sky, or maybe Cole Porter's intoxicating score, as a substitute for Puck's magic drops. The show works less well without "Let's Misbehave" in that spot.

“Blow, Gabriel, Blow” runs head-on at one of the show’s two main themes, the turning of religion into show business. More on that later…

“All Through the Night” has a fairly conventional early musical comedy point – we can only be together in our dreams! In the ‘62 version, Billy and Hope sing exactly the same verses; in ‘34 the second verse was slightly altered. Though the lyric is fairly conventional, delivering no information we don’t already have, dealing in awfully conventional images, the music is extraordinary.

Musicals are more powerful, more impactful, more emotional than plays, because of the abstract nature of music, the non-verbal language of emotion. “All Through the Night” lacks the irony of the rest of the score, but it works so well because the music tells us as much (or more) about Billy and Hope’s feelings than the words do. Almost the entire main melody descends chromatically by half-steps, making the music feel like it doesn’t have a home key, like the melody is just spinning out spontaneously, endlessly shifting back and forth between major and minor, happy and sad – and sinking ever further down into despair. It’s anchor-less, restless, uneasy, but also hauntingly beautiful.

The original version of the show used “All Through the Night” midway through Act I, as Billy and Hope’s first song together. In that spot, it’s too serious, too sincere for this crazy romp of a show, but repositioned here in Act II (where there was originally only a short reprise), it works beautifully.

“Be Like the Bluebird” is so crazy and so meta! Take a look at Mooney’s intro verse:

There’s an old Australian bush song,
That Melba used to sing,
A song that always cheered me
When I was blue.
Even Melba said this bush song
Was a helluva song to sing,
So be quiet whilst I render it for you...

There’s so much that’s funny about this. First, Mooney starts by invoking the famous Australian opera singer Dame Nellie Melba (for whom Melba Toast is named), who had just died in 1931. A “bush song” is an Australian folk song (one famous example of this is “Waltzing Matilda”). It’s funny that this world famous opera singer would think this folk song is “a helluva song to sing” – does that mean it’s a great song or a hard song? After all, Mooney himself then sings it. And as we listen to it, we realize this is not an Australian bush song – it’s just a Cole Porter comedy number. But that intro turns the whole thing into a very wacky meta-joke. Also, Mooney is singing about himself singing here, just like Hope does in “De-Lovely”

And what's the lesson Mooney is trying to impart to Billy? Just to chill, to take life as it comes, to be more Zen. Again, what a funny lesson to come from this mediocre gangster who's nervous as a cat. The whole number is a big meta goof.

"Take Me Back to Manhattan," as good a song as it is, doesn't need to be here. They sing the same verse two and a half times, and it gives us virtually no information beyond that these New Yorkers would rather be in New York, instead of docking in London. On the other hand, it does sort of connect to the two interlocking love triangles – Hope has to choose between Evelyn (London) and Billy (New York), and we know Evelyn himself has chosen New York (Reno). In fact, everybody will choose New York... other than Reno, I guess...

Maybe also, "Take Me Back to Manhattan" reminds us that we've been in Shakespeare's woods all night, a place of freedom and magic, but now that everyone is finding their correct partners, they will have to return to the world of the City with their newfound wisdom.

Yes, Anything Goes is very silly and somewhat old-fashioned, but it's also a lot more than that. This is a really well-constructed, satiric farce, and as you can see, these songs are much richer than they might appear.

We're Merely Mammals

Today, most people think Anything Goes is old-fashioned and family-friendly. But really, it's a very adult show, and it was never meant to be family-friendly. After all, the title is Anything Goes! One verse of the title song even catalogs various sexual tastes that are newly acceptable...

Not much about this show was conventional. The musical comedy had begun thirty years earlier by consciously rejecting tales of rich folks and royalty in operettas, in favor of stories of common people, immigrants, average working Joes and Janes. But as one of the only gentiles writing Broadway scores at the time, as a native of Peru, Indiana, as the heir to a considerable fortune, and as a relatively open gay man, Porter wasn't interested in immigrants or in common people. He had spent time in Paris alongside Ernest Hemmingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Pablo Picasso, and Gertrude Stein.

So Porter wrote his songs about smart, glamorous, rich, sophisticated, sexual people. His lyrics were dripping with French phrases, dirty jokes, references to high society names, new brand names, exclusive night clubs, trans-Atlantic cruises... and America's complicated relationship with morality, after the debacle of Prohibition.

At its core, Anything Goes is a comic but pointed exploration of amorality and moral irony. The characters we like the

most, our “heroes” (Reno, Moonface, Billy) are the least “decent;” and the most “decent” character (Sir Evelyn) is the antagonist (sort of).

John Waters would be right at home here.

Reno stands in for America in the aftermath of the repeal of Prohibition in the early 1930s – going from moral purity (as an evangelist) under Prohibition to moral sin (as a nightclub singer) after the repeal. Her big song “Blow, Gabriel, Blow” slyly, ironically suggests that America should “repent” for the sin of repealing Prohibition (or is it for the sin of enacting Prohibition?). Mooney’s rise in social status aboard the ship mirrors the way gangsters and rum runners, now wealthy, became respectable members of “high society” after Prohibition was repealed.

Religious references pop up throughout the show, usually revealing religious or moral hypocrisy. Reno is a former evangelist, now nightclub singer; her backup singers are called her “fallen angels;” there’s a bishop who gets arrested, leaving his two Christian converts to fend for themselves; Moonface becomes the Reverend Dr. Moon; “Public Enemy Number One” is a parody of a hymn, worshiping celebrity rather than God; “Blow, Gabriel, Blow” is essentially a revival meeting that sounds like a sex act, complete with phony confessions and repentance. And early in the show, Reno comically merges her two sides when she says to the hard-drinking Mr. Whitney, “Come, let us lead them beside distilled waters.” Religion, meet Speakeasy.

Ultimately, Hope (and Anything Goes) chooses love and authentic emotion over money, position, and obligation. America isn’t totally lost, the show’s creators are saying. The romantic marginalization of Sir Evelyn by Hope is an echo of America’s marginalization of Europe after World War I. America was now the Super Power, and we didn’t need Europe anymore. Hope’s mother thinks they need Evelyn (no doubt the Harcourt fortune was decimated by the crash), but Hope doesn’t agree. In fact, in the original production, Evelyn didn’t even get his own song, even though he was a secondary lead. Both Hope and the show – and ultimately Evelyn – reject Britain in favor of America.

The show’s plot turns on such an odd love story – Reno loves Billy, who loves Hope, but Reno ends up with Hope’s fiancé, an explicitly heterosexual character who is subliminally coded as gay (he has a woman’s name and tells Moonface he has “hot pants” for him). Not your standard musical comedy plot – especially in 1934. Is Evelyn an ironic stand-in for the gay but married Cole Porter? The subliminally gay sidekick was a staple of the Astaire-Rogers movies, though here the character has been considerably fleshed out, and he gets a wife by the end. But does Reno’s cut song, “Kate the Great” suggest that it will be an “open marriage”...?

The relationships in our story are like those in A Little Night Music, in which the characters start with the wrong partners and have to reshuffle before the evening is over. This weird mismatching may be easier to understand in the revivals, with “Let’s Misbehave” added in the 60s and “The Gypsy In Me” added in the 80s, explicitly giving

Evelyn a hetero sex drive.

Though Anything Goes trafficked in smart social satire, it was as horny as it was clever. Sex pervades the whole show (“Blow, Gabriel, Blow”…?), and it is made more explicit in “Let’s Misbehave.” But that title isn’t as random as it sounds to us today. “Misbehavior” presented as fun rather than as sin was something fairly new in 1934. Samuel Schmalhausen, a popularizer of Sigmund Freud’s work, wrote in his 1928 book Why We Misbehave:

Static morality has been repudiated in favor of dynamic experience. Fear yields its sovereignty reluctantly to fun. Passion’s coming of age heralds the dawn of a new orientation in the life of the sexes. We may sum up the quintessence of the sexual revolution by saying that the center of gravity has shifted from procreation to recreation.

Schmalhausen extolled the virtue of playful sex:

Sexual love as happy recreation is the clean new ideal of a younger generation sick of duplicity and moral sham and marital insincerity and general erotic emptiness. Sex as recreation is the most exquisite conception of lovers who have learned to look with frank delighted eyes upon the wonder in their own stirred bodies.

A year later in 1929, satirists James Thurber and E. B. White wrote the book Is Sex Necessary?, in which they argued:

During the past year, two factors in our civilization have been greatly overemphasized. One is aviation, the other is sex. Looked at calmly, neither diversion is entitled to the space it has been accorded. Each has been deliberately promoted. In the case of aviation, persons interested in the sport saw that the problem was to simplify it and make it seem safer. With sex, the opposite was true. Everybody was fitted for it, but there was a lack of general interest. The problem in this case was to make sex seem more complex and dangerous. This task was taken up by sociologists, analysts, gynecologists, psychologists and authors; they approached it with a good deal of scientific knowledge and an immense zeal. They joined forces and made the whole matter of sex complicated beyond the wildest dreams of our fathers. The country became flooded with books. Sex, which had hitherto been a physical expression, became largely mental. The whole order of things changed. To prepare for marriage, young girls no longer assembled a hope chest – they read books on abnormal psychology. If they finally did marry they found themselves with a large number of sex books on hand, but almost no pretty underwear.

And that’s what Porter was writing about, when he wrote “Let’s Misbehave” in 1928.

The World Has Gone Mad Today

Many of Cole Porter’s lyrics are incredibly – even savagely – topical. The songs of Anything Goes reference the latest news, gossip, pop culture, and celebrity sightings of 1934, and yet in a way that’s fully organic to the characters and story. There’s no question Reno Sweeney and Billy Crocker would be making jokes about this stuff.

From our vantage point today, close to a century later, we're apt to miss some of that wicked social satire, because so many of the original references are now obscure to us. So subsequent revivals have tinkered a lot with the lyrics to "You're the Top" and "Anything Goes," in particular, worried that contemporary audiences won't get all the original references (they won't), and as a result, exploring these lyrics sometimes requires a lot of digging.

This show brilliantly captures some of America's craziest cultural impulses, most of which are very little different today from what they were in 1934. Anything Goes wasn't really telling a love story; it was telling the story of America awkwardly struggling with the huge social and technological changes that were transforming our nation from a rural culture to an urban one, and consequently a more diverse and socially liberal one; and from a social-status culture to one based on economic status.

Though it was surely unintentional, one could argue that Reno marrying Evelyn is a clear metaphor for the way, for the first time in the 20s and 30s, Americans routinely combined "low culture" and "high culture." In fact that mashup essentially defines American musical comedy.

Today, some frightened conservatives long to return to a mythical, nonexistent 1950s that's whiter, more Christian, and less complicated; and so too did folks in the 1930s fear the massive cultural changes reshaping America. This show, its title, and its title song are all about that.

Every version of the show starts the title song the same way.

Times have changed,
And we've often rewound the clock,
Since the Puritans got a shock,
When they landed on Plymouth Rock.
If today,
Any shock they should try to stem,
'Stead of landing on Plymouth Rock,
Plymouth Rock would land on them.

It's a double joke, built on the two meanings of land, and comically comparing the relative shocks of finding the New World, versus those same 17th-century pilgrims finding the wild nightlife of 1934 New York. Kinda sounds like a Bill & Ted sequel.

There's actually a lot going on here. The times do change and when they do, some people fear that change, and they react by trying to turn us back to an earlier era ("we've often rewound the clock"), a time perceived to be more

innocent, more faithful, more moral. With Ronald Reagan and some of the conservative movement today, the 1960s so freaked them out, that ever since then they've been trying to turn American back to the 1950s. The same thing happened in the 1920s and 30s.

It's telling that Porter invokes the Puritans – the symbol of social ultra-conservatism – as a comic measure of the wild times we find ourselves in "now." No, the Puritan's likely would not have been big fans of speakeasies or The Ziegfeld Follies...

As the first verse of the song begins, we set up this comparison. Once upon a time, so long ago that the days are not just old, but "olden," America was really moral. Except that the use of the archaic "olden" (Porter originally used "former" in that spot), and the extremity of just a "glimpse" being shocking, gives the whole thing a layer of smartass irony. Who'd want to live in "olden days"...?

In olden days a glimpse of stocking
Was looked on as something shocking,
But now, God knows,
Anything Goes.

Women's modesty was a big issue as skirts got shorter, arms got bared, and dresses got more form-fitting. The androgynous, body-disguising, chest-flattening fashions of the 20s were gone. Throughout history, there's always been this weird impulse to hide women's bodies for fear men can't control their sexual urges (this is what the final scene of Grease is about). It's only now that we're concluding it's the men who need to control themselves.

We've become numb to the title phrase of this song. It's just too ubiquitous, too embedded in our culture. But think about that phrase – anything goes, anything is okay, nothing is off limits, there are no rules, no norms, no constraints anymore.

Good authors too, who once knew better words,
Now only use four letter words
Writing prose,
Anything Goes.

What was Porter talking about here?

James Joyce's 1922 masterpiece Ulysses, was banned in England till 1930, and the United States Post Office reportedly burned any copies of the book they found. Finally, in 1933 (a year before Anything Goes opened), the case of Ulysses was re-opened, and the Supreme Court ruled that because the book was not "pornographic" it could

not be banned or censored.

D.H. Lawrence's 1928 novel Lady Chatterly's Lover, about an aristocratic lady who has a sexual affair with her groundskeeper was also banned over its frank discussion of sex (and the importance of orgasm), and its frequent use of the words fuck and cunt. One U.S. Senator exclaimed, "I've not taken ten minutes on Lady Chatterley's Lover, outside of looking at its opening pages. It is most damnable! It is written by a man with a diseased mind and a soul so black that he would obscure even the darkness of hell!"

Erskine Caldwell's 1933 novel God's Little Acre was about a dysfunctional farming family in Georgia obsessed with sex and wealth. The novel's sexual themes were so controversial that the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice asked a New York state court to censor it.

In 1934, Henry Miller's semi-autobiographical novel of his sexual escapades in Paris, Tropic of Cancer, with its frequent use of the word cunt, was banned in the United States shortly after its first publication in France. The ACLU tried to sue the U.S. government, but lost its case. Finally, when the novel was published in 1961, sixty obscenity cases were brought in twenty-one different states. Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice Michael Musmanno wrote that Cancer is "not a book. It is a cesspool, an open sewer, a pit of putrefaction, a slimy gathering of all that is rotten in the debris of human depravity." Porter wasn't kidding about four-letter words. This really was a sea change in popular literature.

The song "Anything Goes" has three bridges, each with a different purpose. The first lists examples of "immoral" acts which lead, in the second bridge, to a general moral chaos, which leads, in the third bridge, to how crazy that chaos makes us all. It's an ironic jab at all the experts of the time warning about the dangers of Modernity.

The song's first bridge lists a bunch of morally sketchy things that "you" (so interesting to put this in the second person!) might enjoy if you live a Fast Life, things which will no longer be off limits in our topsy-turvy culture...

If driving fast cars you like,
If low bars you like,
If old hymns you like,
If bare limbs you like,
If Mae West you like
Or me undressed you like,
Why, nobody will oppose.

When every night,
The set that's smart is
Intruding
In nudist parties

In studios,
Anything Goes.

Before we get to the content, let's look at the craft here. The bridge has seven lines and five of them start with "if," and six of them end with "you like" – and in between an AABBCC rhyme scheme. That's some really skillful writing. Then we return to the verse, and of those six lines, three start with "in," and those same three lines all have an "-ood" in the middle of the line. But also "smart is" makes a kind of subliminal rhyme with "parties," and to top it all off, the last line of the bridge rhymes with the last two lines of the verse that follows it.

In terms of content, much of this lyric references current events. In 1930, twelve states still did not have any speed limits; it was an automobile wild west.

The "low bars" (i.e., speakeasies) of Prohibition were disappearing by the time Anything Goes opened, a year after the repeal of Prohibition. The reference is a joke on the two meanings of the word low. Here the word means disreputable, but also, literally lower in height. According to a 1946 Life magazine article, before Prohibition, bars were 46-47 inches high, but during and after Prohibition, so many more women were drinking that they lowered many bars to 43 inches.

The "old hymns" reference may be a joke about how many hymns were set to the music of drinking songs because those tunes were already popular. Why else would liking old hymns be subversive like the rest of the items in this list? Maybe the joke here is just that "you" like drinking in taverns, where they sing old hymns that have been converted into drinking songs.

Of course, "bare limbs" were still pretty new in women's fashion and still considered shocking by some. Mae West was still a new movie star in 1934, but she already had been writing plays, starring in them, and getting arrested for her plays' "obscenity." After the Hollywood Production Code was established in 1933, West simply perfected the double entente, with famous lines like "When I'm good, I'm very good, but when I'm bad, I'm better."

Nudism / naturism spread throughout Europe in the 1920s and got to America in the 1930s, due in part to sociologist, political theorist, and liberal social critic Maurice Parmelee's 1931 book Nudism in Modern Life. Also, "the set that's smart" refers to the phrase "The Smart Set," meaning the cultural elite, usually fashionable and wealthy. It was also the title of a literary magazine that published from 1900-1930.

The song's second bridge is more general than the first, more a catalog of the fallout. Here, the world is just screwed up, backwards, upside-down, disorienting...

The world has gone mad today
And good's bad today,
And black's white today,
And day's night today,
And that gent today
You gave a cent today
Once had several chateaus.

When folks who still can ride in jitneys
Find out Vanderbilts and Whitneys
Lack baby clo'es,
Anything goes.

No revival has used those last four lines because no one would understand them today. Jitneys were independent taxi cabs or small buses, so the joke is that the middle-class folks who can still afford to take a cab, here in the middle of the Depression, would be shocked to find out that some of the richest Americans (in this case, the Vanderbilt and Whitney families) had lost nearly everything – due to the creation of income and estate taxes not too long before, the effects of the Depression, and the weirdly profligate spending of the Vanderbilts and others. The "baby clothes" might refer to Gloria Vanderbilt, who was a child at the time. The Whitneys went broke through corruption.

The third bridge of "Anything Goes" returns to the second person – you – acknowledging everybody's feeling that the world has gone crazy and it's making us all crazy. Much like right now. And notice this very early critique of the mainstream media...

Just think of those shocks you've got
And those knocks you've got
And those blues you've got
From the news you've got,
And those pains you've got
(If any brains you've got)
From those little radios.

According to the PBS website:

For the radio, the 1930s was a golden age. At the start of the decade 12 million American households owned a radio, and by 1939 this total had exploded to more than 28 million. But why was this 'talking telegram' so popular? As technology improved radios became smaller and cheaper [hence the "little" radios]. They became the central piece of furniture in the average family's living room, with parents and children alike, crowding around the set to hear the latest installment of their favorite show.

News broadcasts influenced the way the public experienced current affairs. When the Hindenburg airship exploded in 1937, reporter Herb Morrison was on the scene, recording the events to be broadcast the following day. But above all the radio provided a way to communicate like never before. Franklin Roosevelt's 'fireside chats' helped the population feel closer to their president than ever.

There's yet another bridge section, with an early lyric that was written but not used in 1934, then restored for the 1987 revival:

If saying your pray'rs you like,
If green pears you like,
If old chairs you like,
If backstairs you like,
If love affairs you like
With young bears you like,
Why nobody will oppose.

And yes, "young bears" meant then what it means now; it's a gay reference that a fair number of New York theatre-goers, "the smart set," probably had heard. "Backstairs" was surely a reference to brothels or speakeasies. But what of these other lines? We know Porter loved to joke in code...

If saying your pray'rs you like = Good Girls
If green pears you like = Young Girls, Virgins
If old chairs you like = Older Women
If backstairs you like = Hookers (or Servants?)
If love affairs you like
With young bears you like = Young Men
Why nobody will oppose.

In other words, Free Love. It does make a certain Porter-esque sense, both in terms of his writing and his biography. With that in mind, this sure does feel like Cole's quirky take on "chacun à son goût." And that may explain why it was cut in 1934...
This last version of the bridge was written by P.G. Wodehouse for the first London production, and it's been used in all the revivals, because so much of the original 1934 lyric is unusable today.

When grandmama whose age is eighty
In night clubs is getting matey
With gigolos,
Anything Goes.
When mothers pack and leave poor father
Because they decide they'd rather
Be tennis pros,

Anything Goes.

That's a fun little joke about married women running off to be lesbians, but this lyric is way too British for this show and these characters. Americans don't use the word "matey" because we don't use "mate" to mean friend; and most Americans don't say, "grandmama." Also in America, "father" and "rather" do not rhyme. And Porter rarely inverted sentences as awkwardly as these first two lines. Still, this stanza does get at another cultural phenomenon of the 1930s.
While the trend up to that point had been for the divorce rate to increase, that got interrupted in the early 1930s. Due to the Depression, many couples stayed together because they couldn't afford divorce. It wasn't until the unemployment rate went down that the increasing divorce rate trend continued. Unemployment was at its highest in 1933, and as the unemployment rate declined throughout the 30s, the divorce rate increased. At the same time, women's tennis greatly increased in popularity.
This cheat rhyme was written for the Act I finale of the 1962 revival:

They think he's gangster number one,
So they've made him their favorite son,
And that goes to show.
Anything Goes!
Anything, Anything, Anything Goes!

But "show" doesn't rhyme with "goes"! Another unused Porter lyric from 1934 has "And that plot twist shows..." which works better.

Much of the original 1934 lyric for "Anything Goes" would just baffle today's audiences, with references to Mrs. Ned McLean (a socialite who was the last private owner of the Hope Diamond), Eleanor Roosevelt's radio broadcasts sponsored by Simmons mattresses, extravagant Broadway producer Max Gordon, movie studio head Sam Goldwyn, Ukrainian movie star Anna Sten, actor and socialite Lady Mendl, and others.

When Anything Goes first opened, the title song worked because it reinforced a feeling the audience already had – that the world is spinning madly out of control, and that sometimes that can be fun. (Or as Little Red might put it, "excited and scared.") As proof of the show's thesis, the songs "Anything Goes" and "You're the Top" offer up example after example ripped from the headlines (and society pages) of 1934. Today when we see Anything Goes, all those examples suggest the craziness today, without literally referencing any of it. Crazy is crazy.

In 1934, Americans were grappling with the massive, disorienting changes our country was going through. It did feel to many American as if all the rules had been ripped up, that literally anything goes. Today we grapple with much the

same thing, here in the early days of the Digital Age, at the start of huge demographic and social changes in America, when the very nature of truth is up for debate. Life today is just as crazy as it was in Reno Sweeney's America, maybe crazier. Today, all these references may serve only as metaphors, but still pretty potent ones.

Every element of this story is testament to this one idea, that anything goes. All the couples are wrongly coupled at first, the clergyman gets arrested and the gangster gets a cruise, the passengers deify a fake murderer, the real gangster is as nervous as a cat, the worldly-wise speakeasy hostess falls for the dorky Englishman... Everything is up for grabs. None of the rules apply. We're in Shakespeare's woods. Anything goes!

Flying Too High with Some Guy in the Sky

The richest song in the show is deceptive in the surface simplicity of both its music and lyrics. Reno's emotionally naked torch song, "I Get a Kick Out of You," is another of Anything Goes' songs that we've gotten too familiar with. We've stopped hearing these lyrics fresh.

Weirdly, the song originally opened the show, revealing Reno's secret crush on Billy. The 1962 revival moved the song to late Act I, and now it's about Reno's surprise at falling in love with Evelyn. It's so much stronger here, because these feelings are revealed to us now after we've spent time with the charmingly smartass Reno for an hour. That's much more potent structurally. When this song opens the show, it gives us a false first impression of Reno; but moved to later in the show, it reveals a deeper layer to Reno.

"I Get a Kick Out of You" has this sinuous Latin line in the low reeds under the vocal intro, which says so much about this very sensual woman, but that line disappears after the intro, and the rest of the song was set, in 1934, to the standard Broadway foxtrot. But in '62 (our version), the main part of the song continues the Latin beat, though still without that reed line. Alongside the Latin syncopation, there are several moments of hemiola (long vocal triplets over an accompaniment in four), that make the beat momentarily ambiguous, just like Reno's feelings.

But what exactly is Reno saying here? She's literally saying that nothing in life gives her particular pleasure or happiness. She is (particularly if we assume Texas Guinan's real life details) a professional cynic and smartass. Guinan, the model for Reno (and for Velma Kelly), greeted her speakeasy guests every night with "Hello, suckers!"

Look at this lyric –

My story is much too sad to be told,
But practically everything
Leaves me totally cold.

Yep, that's the speakeasy hostess alright. And it really is sad. She feels nothing. This isn't the usual musical comedy leading lady. Hope seems more like our leading lady, but she's not; Reno is. She goes on:

The only exception I know is the case
When I'm out on a quiet spree,
Fighting vainly the old ennui,
And I suddenly turn and see
Your fabulous face.

She's racing through life – racing around this ship – doing anything to stave off boredom ("the old ennui"). Nothing thrills her. Nothing moves her. Except one thing – the face of the man she loves. Up until this time, Reno's made a couple off-hand remarks about finding Evelyn cute, but this is Reno dropping the cynicism and honestly looking at her own emotions, maybe for the first time ever.

So why the goofball Sir Evelyn Oakleigh? He finds an undeniable joy in the adventure of life. He's almost childlike in his delight over learning new things. Quite likely, Evelyn is the first man Reno has ever met who's not a cynic. Imagine how different he is from the jaded criminals and bootleggers and chorines who no doubt make up the circle of Reno's friends, none of them trustworthy, none of them ever emotionally open or honest – or delighted by anything.

Like her underworld circle of friends, Reno has seen it all...

I get no kick from champagne,
Mere alcohol,
Doesn't thrill me at all...

Don't miss the punch of those lines. It's one year after Prohibition is repealed, and America's biggest speakeasy queen (again, if we blend Reno and Texas Guinan) is saying alcohol doesn't really do it for her. So she asks the obvious question – if literally everything leaves her cold...

So tell me, why should it be true,
That I get a kick out of you?

Each verse takes an addiction (alcohol, drugs, and adrenaline) all of which do nothing for Reno.

Some get a kick from cocaine,
I'm sure that if
I took even one sniff,

It would bore me terrif-
ically, too,
Yet I get a kick out of you.

The bridge expands on the title phrase –

I get a kick every time
I see
You standing there
Before me.
I get a kick though it's clear
To me,
You obviously
Don't adore me.

Notice the rhyme compounding, giving us a sense of momentum. We get the string of see, me, me, -ly, me, but also before me and adore me. And yet none of the grammar is awkward or strained. It still sounds like Reno's voice.

The last verse follows the established pattern, but this time the music literally takes off with the lyric, and the multiple rhymes give us even more momentum...

Fly-
ing too high
with some guy
in the sky...

But before the stanza is over, the music returns to earth, because there's no kick to be had there.

...Is my i-
-dea of nothing to do.
But I get a kick out of you.

The mood turns right in the middle of the "i" rhymes (splitting the word "idea").

Remember that passenger airplanes were really new at this point, and only rich folks could afford to fly – the first passenger jet, the Boeing 247, was introduced one year before Anything Goes debuted. And Lindberg had made his historic trans-Atlantic flight only seven years earlier.

Is "some guy in the sky" a sly Porter reference to God and religion, especially since Reno is a former evangelist. We

know Porter loved talking in code – just look at his bridges in the title song, cataloging fast living (“low bars,” “fast cars,” etc.) and unconventional sexual tastes (“backstairs,” “love affairs with young bears,” etc.). One of the most interesting aspects of this song is how it changed when it was lifted out of context. In 1934, radio stations wouldn’t play a lyric about cocaine, so Porter had to create the ever dangerous “bop type refrain.” But also, almost every pop singer rewrites the rhythm of the title phrase. Originally, Porter wrote that title phrase to a rhythm that almost no one sings correctly today. Most pop singers – and therefore, most women playing Reno, including Eileen Rodgers as Reno on the 1962 cast album – move the word “kick” to the downbeat.

That’s not what Porter wrote. He placed the word “kick” on beat 4, ahead of the downbeat, to give the word “kick” a kick. Once you hear it the right way (which you will in our production), the other way sounds so wrong.

Please, Saint Peter

As yet another example of its “adult content” (as if ”love affairs with young bears” wasn’t enough), Anything Goes skewers organized religion pretty aggressively throughout the show, often through very pointed satire.

The most obvious commentary on religion jump-starts the plot in the opening scene, as Bishop Dobson gets arrested in Moonface’s place. Why is that funny? Nobody can tell the difference between a bishop and a gangster. Welcome to 1934 America. It’s the first of dozens of swipes taken at American institutions, but at religion even more often than the others. And like several others, it’s a swipe that stays with us all evening, because Mooney is dressed like a preacher till the very end. Throughout the show, Mooney repeatedly does immoral, illegal, and/or unethical things, and all as a clergyman. And no one notices.

Two of our three heroes, Reno and Mooney, have phony religious alter-egos. Reno is a “former evangelist” (i.e., con artist), now a nightclub singer whose songs have weirdly off-kilter religious imagery; Mooney is hiding from the Feds in the clothes of a minister, and soon he’s called “Dr. Moon” by everyone aboard. Mooney spends much of the first act running around the ship in full preacher drag, stealing things and brandishing his Tommy gun.

Reno talks in fake Biblical language periodically, showing us that she was once a religious figure, but also that they she didn’t take it very seriously. She says to Mr. Whitney in the first scene, “I’ve got four fallen angels holding up the bar. Come, let us lead them beside distilled waters.” When Mooney suggests blackmailing Evelyn, we get this Biblical-ish exchange:

Reno: Get thee behind me, Moonface. I kind of like the guy. He’s different.
Moon: But Reno, you promised Billy.
Reno: Thou almost persuadest me to shoot the works. You know, if you weren’t a friend of Billy’s, I’d unfrock you.

In (almost) quoting Luke 4:8, Reno jokingly equates Mooney with Satan – but also herself with Jesus. But she's also (almost) quoting, "Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." (Acts 26:28) This is someone with only a casual knowledge of Scripture, but enough for her purposes. And in comic counterpoint to her fake piety, the exchange ends with her threatening sex!

And these two fake religious figures, Reno and Mooney, will lead the comic revival meeting in Act II. As the meeting climaxes, Reno once again mashes together religion with pop culture, in this case, the language of radio: "Sign off with Satan and tune in with Heaven." The language of the "Blow, Gabriel" lyric is Religious Symbolism as a Second Language. This is an amateur, or more to the point, a religious outsider, leading this revival meeting – with the help of the fake-minister "Dr. Moon." It's obvious neither of them are really believers, and that doesn't seem to bother the crowd a bit. And by the way, why do we want Gabriel to blow his horn? The Bible says that "an archangel with the trumpet of God" will announce the Second Coming, and people have assumed that's Gabriel, particularly since Milton made that connection in Paradise Lost.

So are these drunk, hard-partying passengers really cheering on the Second Coming – and the Apocalypse? They are, but they have no idea that's what they're doing, because Reno and Mooney are first-rate con artists.

Both Reno and Mooney connect to other (not really) "religious" characters. Reno has her "angels," her backup singers, from whom we hear short, comic bits all evening, sometimes about their promiscuity. Do we assume they were also with her back when she was an evangelist, or are they just called angels as an ironic callback to Reno's last gig?

And Mooney's accidental sidekick Bonnie has her religious moment too, when she sings "Heaven Hop," a comic coupling of the sacred and profane (i.e., religion and jazz). The song connects to one of the show's two main themes, the transformation of religion into show biz and pop culture. This song is Bonnie's own personal theology, more joyful, more now-centered, distinct from the authentic theology of the Bishop, the phony theology of Moonface, and the commercialized theology of Reno and her angels.

In Bonnie's theology (coming from the world of Depression-era organized crime), you can be a Good Person and also have fun, drink, smoke, dance – even steal, apparently. For Bonnie, heaven is a party. After all, how could heaven be boring? That's in stark opposition to the new con artists/evangelists crisscrossing America in the 1930s with an apocalyptic message of fire and brimstone (mentioned in Reno's "Gabriel" lyric) and a coming "reawakening" of religious faith.

But all the traditional symbols and conventions of human religion don't serve Bonnie's needs or hold her attention,

so like Americans have always done, she forms her own personal religion, with fewer restrictions and lots more fun.

Notice throughout the lyric how Bonnie blends together traditional religious symbol with her own secular ones. Just in the first few lines, Bonnie (and Cole Porter) tells us this is a different kind of heaven from what we're used to. No laying on clouds strumming lyres in Bonnie's heaven. This song is originally from another Porter musical, so the reference to portals in the first line is just a happy accident in this story set aboard a ship.

Up in Heaven's happy portals,
Where the parties never stop,
All the debonair immortals
Do a dance called the Heaven Hop.
In that big celestial center,
It's the only dance they do;
So before you try to enter,
You better start doin' it too!

Notice the great alteration of the title phrase, obviously, but also Heaven's happy; portals and parties; debonair and do a dance, and later, dance they do; and celestial center. Those last couple lines are subtle but potent jabs at "revealed scripture," the idea that only one religion has the true Secret Knowledge. Only by being In the Know can you enter Heaven. But here, that Secret Knowledge is a new dance.
Then, like lots of other pop songs in the 1920s and 30s, Bonnie introduces a new dance, by giving us the choreography. The first two lines are so rich – first you move like an angel, then you move like a musical comedy star:

Spread your wings and start them flappin',
Lift your feet and set them tappin',
Start right now and do the Heaven Hop,
Hop, the Heaven Hop!
Wag your ankles to that meter,
Let your shoulders gently teeter,
If you want to, please Saint Peter,
Take up the Heaven Hop!

The reference to St. Peter is extra funny because he's regarded as the first pope. You couldn't pick a more traditional religious figure than the first pope, but that's who Bonnie wants to dance with. And why not? Or is Bonnie just assuming that St. Peter won't be able to stop himself?

Some versions of the song have the comma before "please Saint Peter," and some don't. With the comma, Bonnie's inviting St. Peter to join her; without the comma, it's about dancing in order to "please" (i.e., make happy) St. Peter.

Similar, but different ideas...

There's a short bridge and we get a better glimpse into Bonnie's heaven, and the most explicit example of the sacred-profane mashup. It starts with humility and reverence:

When the angels play low
On their harps of gold,
Kneel and pray low,

But the sacred is immediately short-circuited in favor of the profane:

Then get up and shake your halo!

Again, act like an angel (play a harp, kneel and pray), then act like a jazz baby (shake your halo). First a humble act, then a show-off act. Maybe Bonnie's heaven is more like the Underworld of ancient myths, the place everybody goes when they die, whether "good" or "bad."

Let that rhythm filter through ya
Till you holler, "Hallelujah!"
Start right now and
Do the Heaven Hop.

"That rhythm" is show biz, jazz, but "filter through ya" sounds more like religion. Exactly. Just like "Blow, Gabriel, Blow." America has a long, weird tradition of greatly altering religious traditions to fit our own needs, and this is just a comic distillation of that habit.

But is "Heaven Hop" a song Bonnie just knows? Or is it one of Reno's songs, and Bonnie knows all of Reno's songs? It's pretty safe to assume that Bonnie and Snake Eyes would patronize Reno's speakeasies throughout Prohibition. Is Bonnie Roxie Hart to Reno's Velma Kelly? Reno and Velma were both based on Texas Guinan, after all...

Act II opens with the mock religious hymn, "Public Enemy Number One," full of religious fervor, raising murderer Snake Eyes Johnson to Christ-like stature. That's a pretty fierce poke at American culture – then and now. It's also one of dozens of moments in the show that illustrate its title – literally Anything Goes.

And there's the crazy revival meeting in the middle of Act II, with broken and mismatched religious imagery swirling around, all of which devolves into nonsense. Finally, after many calls for a confession, Billy makes one and is

immediately arrested. And then the same thing happens to Mooney. In this religious space, it doesn't pay to confess. In this world, religion is broken.

You're Cellophane!

In the original Anything Goes, several of the lyrics were full of references to people and things that were popular in 1934, many of which we haven't even heard of today. So a lot of the original lyric for "You're the Top" and "Anything Goes" would just be baffling to audiences today; and instead of listening to the song, they'd be feeling left behind and confused. Those lyrics had to be revised for the revivals.

Mitchell Morris writes in his article "Lists of Louche Living: Music in Cole Porter's Social World," in the book A Cole Porter Companion:

From early in his career, Porter loved references to historical as well as contemporary figures, usually in some brash situation that flatters his audience (we recognize the reference and we get to poke fun at it too). Porter as a lyricist loved metonymic things, particularly lists. On the one hand, these lists frame a particular kind of eroticism – they most often appear in songs of romance (however ambivalent) and employ potentially endless wit, since the list could hypothetically continue to exhaustion, in the service of courtship. But the list also serves to create an implied social world in which Cole's immediate audience, who certainly recognize the references, are joined by a larger and more inchoate audience through magazines, recordings, and radio, joined together by their sense of inclusion. And now we return to the difficulties of Porter's intense social embeddedness – since he depended heavily on the evanescence of the current reference, his lists can have an unusually short cultural half-life. Even when some brief excavation securely identifies a reference, it takes a great deal of time to unpack the halo of associations that are compressed around it, and that time is the death of wit. But though the wit be diminished in explication, the richness that comes from reconstructing the social network condensed into a single reference offers a different set of rewards.

Contrary to what a lot of directors and actors think, it is not important for the audience to get every reference; but it is important that the actors get them, so that they can live fully and honestly in this world. That sense of reality is the real value of period references. After all, we can enjoy Shakespeare and Gilbert & Sullivan without knowing all the various cultural and political references.

All that said, here's a glossary, for actors and directors working on Anything Goes, and for all musical theatre fangirls and fanboys who just love the show. Take a look particularly at the juxtaposition of these pop culture references against each other, in their context. Porter is doing some really subtle, sophisticated social commentary in many of these lyrics.

From the original 1934 script:

“Manhattan” – a cocktail made with whiskey, sweet vermouth, and bitters. While rye is the traditional whiskey of choice, other commonly used whiskeys include Canadian whisky, bourbon, blended whiskey, and Tennessee whiskey, invented in the early 1870s at the Manhattan Club.

“Grosvenor House” – one of the largest private homes in London, torn down during World War I, and replaced with the luxury Grosvenor House Hotel

“Tommy gun” – the Thompson submachine gun, invented by John T. Thompson in 1918, and became infamous during the Prohibition era.

“rote shot” – a section of the newspaper with society photographs, called the “rotogravure,” after the printing process

“Evelyn” – a then common British man’s name pronounced EVE-lin.

“Snake Eyes Johnson” and “Moonface Martin” – jokes on 1930s gangster nicknames, like Baby Face Nelson, Pretty Boy Floyd, Bugsy Siegel, Machine Gun Kelly, Lucky Luciano...

“dicks” – law enforcement; a slang term for detectives, originally coined in Canada and brought south by rumrunners during Prohibition. The comic strip character Dick Tracy was named for this term.

“a wireless” – a telegram

“Mater” – British for Mother, from the Latin, an intentionally old-fashioned term

“Eight Bells Strike” – the striking of eight bells on a ship says a four-hour watch shift is over (it’s not connected to a specific time on the clock)

“my sea legs...” – a person’s ability to keep their balance and not feel seasick when on board a moving ship.

“Nicholas Murray Butler” – a famous American philosopher, diplomat, and educator; president of Columbia University, president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and a recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize.

“Damn white of him” – originally used under British colonialism, an expression of appreciation for honorable or gracious behavior, under the assumption that white people were inherently more virtuous.

“The Social Register” – according to Wikipedia, “The social elite was a small closed group. The leadership was well known to the readers of society pages, but in larger cities it was impossible to remember everyone, or to keep track of the new debutantes, the marriages, and the obituaries. The solution was the Social Register, which listed the names and addresses of the families who mingled in the same private clubs, attended the right teas and cotillions, worshipped together at prestige churches, funded the proper charities, lived in exclusive neighborhoods, and sent their daughters to finishing schools and their sons away to prep schools”

“Beefeater” – actually a ceremonial guard at the Tower of London, but here just referring to a British person, possibly also implying that Evelyn is stiff...?

“Coliseum” – the famous amphitheater in Rome, built in 70-80 AD

“Louvre Museum” – the world’s largest museum, in Paris, holding some of our great works of art, including the “Mona Lisa.”

“Symphony by Strauss” – German composer Richard Strauss was still actively writing operas and concert works when Anything Goes opened.

“Bendel bonnet” – a ladies’ hat from Henri Bendel, the upscale women’s specialty store still today based in New York City, selling handbags, jewelry, luxury fashion accessories, home fragrances and gifts

“Shakespeare Sonnet” – Shakespeare wrote 154 sonnets, fourteen-line poems

“Mickey Mouse” – you have to remember that for these characters living in 1934, Steamboat Willie premiered only six years ago, and Mickey was still only in black and white...

“Vincent Youmans” – Broadway composer of many musicals, including No, No, Nanette, Hit the Deck, and several Hollywood films

“Mahatma Gandhi” – still in the middle of his historic fight for independence for colonial India from Great Britain at this moment

“Napoleon Brandy” – an “extra old” blend of brandy in which the youngest brandy is stored for at least six years

“The National Gallery” – Famous art gallery in Washington, D.C.

“Garbo’s salary” – according to an article on Slate.com, “After the success of Flesh and the Devil (1927), Greta Garbo demanded that MGM raise her salary from $600 per week to $5,000 per week. Louis B. Mayer hemmed and hawed, so Garbo sailed to Sweden. Eventually Mayer gave in and Garbo sailed back. $5,000 per week comes to $260,000 per year, or the equivalent in today’s dollars of $4.6 million per year.”

“cellophane” – according to Wikipedia, “Whitman’s candy company initiated use of cellophane for candy wrapping in the United States in 1912 for their Whitman’s Sampler. They remained the largest user of imported cellophane from France until nearly 1924, when DuPont built the first cellophane manufacturing plant in the US. Cellophane saw limited sales in the US at first since while it was waterproof, it was not moisture proof—it held water but was permeable to water vapor. This meant that it was unsuited to packaging products that required moisture proofing. DuPont hired chemist William Hale Church, who spent three years developing a nitrocellulose lacquer that, when applied to Cellophane, made it moisture proof. Following the introduction of moisture-proof Cellophane in 1927, the material’s sales tripled between 1928 and 1930.” Our story is set in 1934.

“Derby winner” – the 1934 running of the Kentucky Derby was its 60th!

“You’re a Brewster body” – the frame for a Bentley or Rolls Royce luxury car

“A Ritz hot toddy” – a specialty drink of the Ritz Hotel bar in Paris

“the sleepy Zuder Zee” – The Zuiderzee was a shallow bay of the North Sea in the northwest of the Netherlands. The characters in Anything Goes know this because in 1928, sailing events for the Amsterdam Summer Olympics were held on the Zuiderzee.

“Bishop Manning” – Episcopal Bishop of St. John the Divine Cathedral in Manhattan.

“A Nathan panning” – a bad review from New York drama critic George Jean Nathan

“broccoli” – something of a novelty in 1934, having been farmed commercially in the US only since the 1920s, and the first advertising campaign on its behalf didn’t occur until 1929. So in 1934, broccoli was the culinary cutting edge

“a night at Coney” – Coney Island

“Irene Bordoni” – French actress who starred on Broadway in Cole Porter’s 1928 musical Paris, introducing the song “Let’s Do It” (which had replaced “Let’s Misbehave”)

“a fol-de-rol” – a useless ornament or accessory, nonsense

“Arrow collar” – the famous “Sanforized” collar on Arrow Shirts. The Arrow Collar Man became an advertising symbol in the 1920s for rugged masculinity.

“Coolidge dollar” – the very sound, very strong American dollar, under President Calvin Coolidge, before the Depression

“Fred Astaire” – Broadway and film star of musical comedies

“(Eugene) O’Neill” – Pulitzer Prize winning American playwright of powerful dramas, including Anna Christie (1920), The Emperor Jones (1920), The Hairy Ape (1922), Desire Under the Elms (1924), Strange Interlude (1928), Mourning Becomes Electra (1931), and others

“Whistler’s Mama” – the famous painting actually called Arrangement in Grey and Black No.1, best known as Whistler’s Mother, painted by the American painter James McNeill Whistler in 1871

“Camembert” – A mellow, soft cheese with a creamy center first marketed in Normandy, France.

“Inferno’s Dante” – Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) author of The Divine Comedy, the third part of which deals with Inferno (Hell).

“the great Durante” – comedian/actor Jimmy Durante. His first film was in 1930, but he had made 19 films by 1934

“de trop” – a comic mispronunciation of the French phrase de trop, meaning too much, not wanted, unwelcome

“A Waldorf Salad” – a salad of apples, walnuts, raisins, celery, and mayonnaise, originated at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in Manhattan.

“Berlin ballad” – A romantic song by American songwriter Irvin Berlin, who by 1934 had already written standards like “Alexander’s Ragtime Band,” “What’ll I Do?”, “Blue Skies,” and “Puttin’ on the Ritz.” A few years later, in 1938, Berlin would write “God Bless America.”

“an Old Dutch master” – a Dutch master painter like Rembrandt, but ALSO a brand of cigars

“Mrs. Astor” (changed to “Lady Astor” in 1962) – Mrs. John Jacob Astor, leading New York socialite.

“Pepsodent” – toothpaste introduced in the USA in 1915 by the Pepsodent Company of Chicago. The original formula for the paste contained pepsin, a digestive agent designed to break down and digest food deposits on the teeth, hence the brand and company name. Pepsodent was among the first big radio advertisers, sponsoring the Amos and Andy radio show from 1929-1939. Also, from 1930 to late 1933 a massive animated neon advertising sign for the toothpaste, featuring a young girl on a swing, hung on West 47th Street in Times Square in New York City.

“the steppes of Russia” – a region of grasslands joining Europe and Asia – Around 1930 the Soviet Union wanted to attract foreign tourists to bring in currency and improve its external image. On Stalin’s and the Party’s initiative a national tourist agency was founded. Intourist was responsible for attracting, accommodating and escorting all foreign guests. Western advertising styles were applied to appeal to the target audience. Intourist posters pictured a tourist paradise, not a country of laborers and peasants. Trains were no icons of progress but a comfortable way of transport. Intourist women were not working hard in a factory but were either fashionable or exotic.

“Pants on a Roxy usher” – the famous Roxy Theatre in Manhattan (“the Cathedral of motion pictures”) had a squad of ushers who were trained like an army platoon and wore very tight pants.

“a dance in Bali” – an island in Indonesia, that was becoming an artist magnet in the 1930s, as its native population was turning out really radical artworks for export, and at the same time, the West was seeing the first photographs of Bali and its culture

“[Sandro] Botticelli” – an Italian Renaissance painter

“[John] Keats” – an English Romantic poet

“[Percy Bysshe] Shelley” – an English Romantic poet, who was a political, social, and artistic radical

“Ovaltine” – the “flavored milk supplement,” that sponsored the Little Orphan Annie radio show from 1933-1940.

“G.O.P.” – Grand Old Party, i.e. Republicans.

“Tower of Babel” – Biblical tower in the land of Shinar, the building of which ceased when a confusion of languages took place.

“Whitney stable” – the socially prominent Whitney family bred famous horses

“Mrs. Baer’s son, Max” (also referred to as “Maxie Bauer”) – Max Baer, World Heavyweight Champion in the 1930s (his son, Max Baer Jr. played Jethro on The Beverly Hillbillies)

“Rudy Vallee” – 1920s/1930s crooner, who often sang through a megaphone and later starred in the original production of How To Succeed In Business Without Really Trying.

“Phenolax” – a pink flavored wafer laxative, first introduced in 1908

“Drumstick Lipstick” – brand of makeup manufactured by Charbert, a French cosmetics firm.

“brig” – military prison

“in irons” – shackled

“The Dean boys” – baseball players and brothers Dizzy and Daffy, members of the famed “Gashouse Gang,” the 1934 St. Louis Cardinal baseball team, which won 95 games, the National League pennant, and the 1934 World Series – just months before Anything Goes opened!

“Max Gordon” – Broadway producer from the 1920s through the 1950, famous for extravagant productions

“Jitneys” – independent taxi cabs or small buses. The joke here is that the middle-class folks who can still afford to take a cab, here in the middle of the Depression, would be shocked to find out that some of the richest Americans (in this case, the Vanderbilt and Whitney families) had lost nearly everything.

“Vanderbilts and Whitneys” – two prominent rich families in New York

“Sam Goldwyn” – movie studio head

“Lady Mendl” – an American actress, interior decorator, author of the influential 1913 book The House in Good Taste, and a prominent figure in New York, Paris, and London society. Her morning exercises were famous, including yoga, standing on her head, and walking on her hands.

“Missus R.” and “Franklin” – Eleanor and Franklin Roosevelt

“broadcast a bed from Simmons” – Eleanor Roosevelt did weekly radio broadcasts sponsored by Simmons mattresses

“Mrs. Ned McLean” – a socialite who was the last private owner of the Hope Diamond

“Anna Sten” – Ukrainian movie star

“Swannee River” – a reference to Stephen Foster’s famous song “Old Folks at Home” and to the Gershwin song “Swannee

“goose’s liver” – pate

“Russian Ballet” – reference to the 1934–1935 world tour by the Dandré-Levitoff Russian Ballet

“the Oxford movement” – a 19th-century movement of High Church members of the Church of England which eventually developed into Anglo-Catholicism, arguing for the reinstatement of some older Christian traditions of faith and their inclusion into Anglican liturgy and theology. Presumably, Mrs. Wentworth is confusing the Oxford Movement with The Oxford Group was a Christian organization founded in 1931 by the American Christian missionary Frank Buchman.

“Sing Sing” and “Joliet” – famous maximum security prisons

Additional References From the 1962 Version:

“The Globe American” – a generic fictitious name for a newspaper

“Hymsie Brown, the fighter” – a fictitious nicknamed boxer

“you know the New Deal” – reference to government red tape, bureaucracy

“Toscanini” – Italian conductor Arturo Toscanini. The New York Philharmonic under Toscanini, in 1931, became the first orchestra to offer regular live coast-to-coast radio broadcasts of its concerts, gaining Toscanini unprecedented fame and a remarkable salary of $110,000 per year.

“Milton Berle” – already a successful stand-up comedian in the 1930s, patterning himself after one of Vaudeville’s top comics, Ted Healy (the inspiration for Billy Flynn in Chicago). A year before Anything Goes opened, Berle starred in the short musical film Poppin’ the Cork, a topical musical comedy about the repealing of Prohibition.

“tomato ketchup” – During the 1930s Heinz increased their sales force and advertising, to battle the drop in sales due to the Depression. Heinz salesmen were expected to be at least 6ft tall, impeccably dressed and particularly eloquent at promoting Heinz products. Their equipment ¬ which included chrome vacuum flasks, pickle forks and olive spears ¬ weighed about 30lbs.

“Chippendale” – various styles of furniture fashionable in the late 18th century and named after the English cabinetmaker Thomas Chippendale

“Fourth Dimension” – according to Project Muse, “During the first three decades of the twentieth century, the fourth dimension was a concern common to artists in nearly every major modern movement: Analytical and Synthetic Cubists, Italian Futurists, Russian Futurists, Suprematists, and Constructivists, American modernists in the Stieglitz and Arensberg circles, Dadaists, and members of De Stijl. Kandinsky’s own awareness of the idea, and the growing interest in Germany in the space-time world of Einstein. Although by the end of the 1920s the temporal fourth dimension of Einsteinian Relativity Theory had largely displaced the popular fourth dimension of space in the public mind, one further movement was to explore a fourth spatial dimension: French Surrealism.”

“George Bernard Shaw” – British playwright (Pygmalion, Major Barbara, Man and Superman, Saint Joan, etc.)

“verse” – Today, we call the first section of a song the intro, which sets up the topic, before we get to the first verse and main melody (though many songs today don’t have one). Then we get the first verse, which introduces the main melody, and then in most pop songs, we get the chorus. Sometimes there’s a contrasting section called the bridge. But in Porter’s time, the first section was the verse, and what we call the verse and chorus were together called the refrain.

“Tinpantithesis” – an invented joke word, meaning the Tin Pan Alley (common) antithesis (opposite) of good music

“Gullery” – a made-up word, Billy’s joke on Mrs. Harcourt

“un peu d’amour” – French for a little love

“DAR, PTA, and WPA” – The Daughters of the Revolution, the Parents-Teachers Association, and the Works Progress Administration – three things that do not belong together, but Mooney doesn’t know that...

“rout” – In “Heaven Hop,” Bonnie sings, “We’re all set for a rout; come on, let’s step out!” And rout had another definition that we no longer use. One “dated” definition of the word was “an assembly of people who have made a move toward committing an illegal act that would constitute an offense of riot;” which then came to mean “a crowd of

people; rabble," or more to our point, "a fashionable gathering."

"Dr. Livingstone, I presume?" – This is drunk Mr. Whitney's response to an Angel saying, "Mr. Whitney, we've been looking for you!" It's a reference to a legendary exchange when explorer-journalist Henry Stanley found missing missionary Dr. David Livingstone (pronounced liv-ing-stun) deep in the African forest in 1871. It's not as random a joke as it seems...

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