

THE KING AND I

Music by Richard Rodgers, book and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II based on "Anna and the King of Siam" by Margaret Landon

Set against a dazzling and exotic backdrop The King and I is the moving story of Anna, an English governess, who tries to help an Eastern king to come to terms with the modern world, but he is unable to resist the forces of ancient customs. The conflict between Eastern and Western cultures inspired this well-loved musical, which is always a firm favourite with the public. The score includes "I Whistle A Happy Tune", "Hello Young Lovers", "Getting To Know You", "Something Wonderful" and "Shall We Dance?".

THE STORY

Anna Leonowens, a young English widow, arrives with her son Louis in Bangkok, capital of the kingdom of Siam, in the early 1860's. She has been engaged by the King to teach English and Western ideas to his family of many wives and many more children. Anna tells Louis how she will bravely face the dangers before them (I Whistle a Happy Tune) - and indeed she doubts whether her decision to come was right.

At Court, her Western ideas quickly conflict with oriental traditions. The King's proclaiming of his belief in Western ideals does not stop him accepting a slave girl Tuptim as a gift from the King of Burma. Tuptim is repelled by him (My Lord and Master) and loves Lun Tha who has escorted her to Bangkok.

When Anna meets the King, her doubts turn to anger when she discovers he has chosen to forget his various promises concerning salary and particularly that he had promised her a brick house next to the palace. She is only prevented from leaving by meeting the King's enchanting children (The March of the Siamese Children). She decides to stay; and the royal wives are keen to hear of the differences between their two cultures, and the similarity when it comes to love and family (Hello, Young Lovers).

Anna instructs the royal children, the King's wives, even sometimes the King himself (Getting to Know You). They learn of the outside world, and wonders like snow, ice, and individual freedom. The King is fascinated, yet troubled, by these ideas (A Puzzlement). Anna has meanwhile befriended Tuptim and lent her the new American novel 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' but she is worried that Tuptim and Lun Tha are meeting secretly (We Kiss in a Shadow).

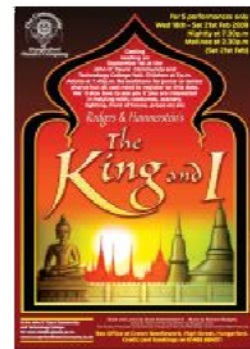
Anna admires the King's strengths, but his stubbornness infuriates her. Lady Thiang, the King's first wife understands this and counsels patience, for she sees how much the King and Anna need each other. For all his

stubbornness, pride and occasional cruelty, Lady Thiang says, he can sometimes do Something Wonderful.

The King learns that a British diplomat is on the way to Bangkok, obviously to assess the King's hold on his country. Anna cleverly suggests that a European dinner, with all the Court in Western dress, and with a suitable entertainment (which the intelligent Tuptim could devise) would give Sir Edward Ramsay an excellent impression of an enlightened and sophisticated society - and of the King, too. The King is so impressed with 'his own idea' that he rewards the strong-willed "Mrs. Anna" with a firm promise of the brick house, as in their agreement.

The dinner is a great success; Tuptim's entertainment, a ballet entitled The Small House of Uncle Thomas (an outstanding feature of the score) will be her last act in Siam because Lun Tha has arranged an escape immediately afterwards, so they will be together for ever (I Have Dreamed). The 'subversive' message of the ballet's story worries the King momentarily, but Sir Edward's compliments and generous endorsement of his regime give the King great satisfaction.

The plan has worked. The King and Anna, alone, congratulate each other and in the mood of celebration he asks her to teach him the polka (Shall We Dance?) As they dance, we see how the growing friendship is rapidly ripening into sexual attraction, but the mood is shattered when news comes that Lun Tha and Tuptim have been caught escaping. The secret police kill him, and the King, suddenly no longer a Westernised monarch, prepares to punish Tuptim with the whip. Anna upbraids him for this regression to barbarism, which has spoiled everything he has been striving to achieve. His arm falls, the whip



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drops, but he realises that his absolute power has evaporated and he flees the room, a broken man.

Anna realises that she has so humiliated the King that she must leave Siam, but she is stopped from embarking by a note from him - he expresses his gratitude for all she has done, but says he is dying. Shocked, she returns to the Palace and finds him on his deathbed surrounded by wives and children, who now beg Anna not to leave

them. She is deeply moved and realises how much she loves them and how much they need her. The dying King commands her to take notes from his eldest son, Prince Chulalongkorn, who will be the new King. The Prince, who has learned his lessons well from Anna, announces that there will no more bowing and scraping before him, but as his father dies and all present prostrate themselves, their obeisance is not only to the dead King but to the new one.

Characters

Anna Leonowens

A young widow, in whose heart the pain of bereavement is still very strong. She is compassionate but business-like, and - almost - completely undaunted by the regal magnificence of her employer. She is presented in word, deed and song as an entirely sympathetic person.

Louis Leonowens

Her young teenage son, keen to acclimatise to the strange lifestyle at an Eastern Court and fiercely fond of his mother.

The Kralahome

The Prime Minister. A hard and bigoted official who obviously cannot understand why his master is flirting with Western ideas.

The King

He deserves our admiration for his efforts in trying to come to terms with Western ideas and ways of life, but the conflict between Eastern and Western values, combined with his inbred sense of being a Supreme Ruler, ultimately destroys him

Lady Thiang

Wise, composed and understanding, she can see clearly both sides of the King's nature and thus of her country's standing in the world.

Tuptim / Lun Tha

Star-crossed lovers who are pawns in the game of the giant rulers of the Far East.

Prince Chulalongkorn

The heir to the throne, whose mixture of filial piety and awareness of the need to change are partly a result of Anna's teaching and partly inherited from both his parents.

Sir Edward Ramsay

Anna's old flame and an important player in the diplomatic game for the friendship of Siam.