**Barnum**

**By Mark Bramble**

In the middle of the 19th century, Phineas Taylor (P.T.) Barnum introduces his circus acts as he stands in front of a tent, proclaiming "There Is a Sucker Born Ev'ry Minute". He loves spectacle and excitement, using hype and "humbug" to promote his exhibits. His wife Charity disagrees with his use of "humbug" but loves him and aims to keep him grounded. Barnum then introduces the oldest woman alive, Joice Heth, and thanks to some Barnum humbug she becomes a success ("Thank God I'm Old"). His wife Charity ("Chairy") urges him to get a job in a factory, but Barnum refuses ("The Colors of My Life [Part One]") and Charity wryly admits and accepts the disparity between their views ("The Colors of My Life [Part Two]"). Barnum enlists clowns to help in building a museum to house his attractions (with expected comical results) and it's up to Charity to encourage him to keep going ("One Brick at a Time"), with the result that "everything about [his] museum was spectacular" ("Museum Song"); however, the museum burns down accidentally. Barnum finds two new star attractions, Tom Thumb, who appears to advise that "Bigger Isn't Better", and Jumbo the elephant. Barnum then becomes manager of the famous Swedish opera singer Jenny Lind ("Love Makes Such Fools of Us All"). Barnum becomes enamored of her and sees the attraction of going on tour with her ("Out There"). He accompanies Jenny on tour, leaving Charity behind, as a marching band greets them ("Come Follow the Band"). Although all seems to be going well for Barnum, he finds that without Charity in his life he is miserable, and he decides to break ties with Jenny and return home to the woman he loves ("Love Makes Such Fools of Us All [Reprise]"). Upon his return to Charity, he promises to live the more sedate life she desires for him, in "Black and White." After a failed stint running a clockworks factory and a failed attempt to build his own city, he turns to politics; when his campaign looks doomed to fail due to lack of interest, Charity realizes how important his talents and passion are in his life and allows him to inject color and life into his campaign. He is elected Mayor of Bridgeport, and the two of them recognize the value in each other's approach to life and how they complement one another ("The Colors of My Life [Reprise]"). Barnum is prepared to run for President, but his beloved Charity dies suddenly, leaving Barnum bereft and alone. When Barnum finds himself cheated of the Presidential nomination by his political party, he laments his position, realizes that his talent for Humbug will never leave him and wishes to "make it right, shoot a rocket, shine a light" ("Prince of Humbug"). James Anthony Bailey arrives and offers him the chance to "Join the Circus". Initially resisting, he relents (thanks in part to Charity's two-headed coin, which she has used to humbug him throughout the show) and joins Bailey, and they form the famous circus Barnum and Bailey.

In "a princely final attraction", Barnum appears before the audience ("The Final Event: There is a Sucker Born Ev'ry Minute" [Reprise]") and reflects on his past:

"Of course, that was a long time ago...and Joice Heth is gone and forgotten. And so's the American Museum...and the Living Whale...and Jennie Lind...and my poor Tom Thumb. And them reubens that came over on the Mayflower have gone to dust...and Tom Jefferson's a memory...and old Franklin's flown his last kite. So my kind of Humbug's disappeared. Pity."