

I Married Wyatt Earp

Suggested in part by the book "I Married Wyatt Earp" by Glenn G. Boyer

Book by Sheilah Rae and Thomas Edward West

Lyrics by Sheilah Rae

Music by Michele Brouman

This “creative nonfiction” musical is based on the historical events of the American West, and boasts an all-female cast of 11 members. With a rousing, wide-ranging score that ranges from pop to country-western to Victorian dance hall songs, *I Married Wyatt Earp* traces the true-life tale of Josephine Marcus, who escaped her stifling upper-class San Francisco Jewish family by bluffing her way into a Gilbert & Sullivan troupe en route to Tombstone, Arizona in the late 1800s. There she met the love of her life—Wyatt Earp—and plunged into a tumult of scandals and outrage that led to the notorious and deadly Shootout at the OK Corral. As Wyatt’s widow, an 81-year-old Josie drags her vendetta against 90-year-old Allie Earp (widow of Wyatt’s brother Virgil) from the 1880’s into 1943 as they struggle their way toward reconciliation and ultimately, forgiveness.

Historical Note

The story of Wyatt Earp, his brothers, and Doc Holliday has become American Legend. Almost all of the characters depicted in *I Married Wyatt Earp* are based on real people. After the discovery of silver in the nearby mountains, Tombstone, Arizona was a booming town in 1879, and yet within a few short years, the entire place became practically deserted. During its heyday, Tombstone produced over \$80 million dollars of silver within ten years; the town had approximately 12,000 men and only 860 women, mostly prostitutes, schoolmarms, and few assorted wives. The political and socio-economic events which led up to the Shootout at the OK Corral have been dramatized in over 54 movies and 13 television shows, but the story of the unconquerable, gutsy women in Tombstone who loved and lived with these lawmen and outlaws has never been told. This is an attempt to recreate their story.

Authors’ Note

I Married Wyatt Earp: the Recollections of Josephine Sarah Marcus by Glenn Boyer first attracted bookwriter and lyricist Sheilah Rae’s attention when she was skimming another book called *Pioneer Jews* by Harriet and Fred Rochlin. In a chapter called ‘Humdingers’, she ran across the scandalous (for the 1880’s) photograph of Josie Marcus. Reading about Josie’s adventurous life, Sheilah immediately decided that this was indeed the ‘stuff of musicals’! In researching the period and these characters, co-bookwriter Thomas Edward West and Sheilah realized how little had changed in the world for women: they are still victims of abuse and drug addiction, still live in fear of their men coming home safely. And, of course, the time period was attractive to composer Michele Brouman, because of the enormous palette of musical colors the period offered: western, folk, G&S, saloon songs, Americana. We all set out to create the telling of a unique story, but chose to tell it through the women’s eyes only, so as not to compete with the many versions of the Earp myth that already existed. We hoped that telling this story from the women’s perspective would shed a new light on the contribution of women to the development of the West, a story rarely told.

Ask The Authors:

Q: Where are Wyatt Earp and all the other men?

A: In our research we became aware that in all the many books, movies and TV shows which have been done about the events surrounding the “Shootout at the OK Corral”, the women were either ignored, marginalized, or distorted (John Ford’s classic film *My Darling Clementine* invented female characters who never existed at all.) By eliminating the men entirely, we could ensure that the focus is on the women only. Our challenge was to create a story where the Tombstone events were subordinate to the conflict between two gutsy, admirable survivors.

Q: How much is fact and how much is fiction?

A: That question’s not easily answered, because so much of the accounts of the “real” events are contradictory. The starting point for our show was Glenn Boyer’s book of Josie Earp’s memoirs, which itself has been the center of controversy as to its historical accuracy. Boyer based it on two different manuscripts purporting to be dictated by Josie, but many scholars doubt the authenticity of those documents. Josie Earp herself was known to tailor the truth to suit her needs, and devoted much of her later life in Los Angeles to creating the myth of “lawman” Wyatt Earp that has been handed down today.

What’s missing from all of Josie’s accounts, written decades after the Tombstone days, is any mention of Wyatt’s wife Mattie. She certainly had her own reasons for doing so. When we discovered that Josie attempted to sue Allie to block the publication of her memoirs in 1943, we knew that we had found the dramatic event to set our story in motion.

Q: Are all the characters real?

A: Any dramatization of history has to condense, compress and construct events and characters to conform to the restrictions and demands of the medium. With Josie Marcus and all of the Earp women, we have tried to remain true to the “real” people, as much as they are knowable through historical documents. Pauline Rackham is based on the real-life actress and impresario Pauline *Markham*, but audiences told us that her last name sounded too much like “Marcus” so we decided to change it to avoid confusion. We invented the characters of Cora, Maude and Penelope to represent the rest of Pauline’s acting troupe.

The characters of the older Josie and Allie were not in early versions of the show. The “older Josie” character was introduced first, sitting in the Polo Lounge of the Beverly Hills Hotel, reminiscing about her past. With the addition of the “older Allie”, the story became more dramatic in both the past (the 1880’s) and “the present” (1943).

Q: What about “that photo”?

A: Again, historians disagree about whether or not this is the actual photo of Josie Marcus. For our purposes as dramatists, we accepted it as the real thing and built much of the drama around it. One only need look at the recent flap surrounding “scandalous” photos of Miley Cyrus and Vanessa Hudgens (of *High School Musical*) to see how little has changed in over 100 years.