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Past duos were Rodgers and Hart (far left), Rodgers and Hammerstein, and Lerner and Loewe.

Rodgers and Lerner: (Continued from page 12)

which Alan is working into a book. The sessions there were not exciting. They were long-drawn-out affairs—with a certain amount of pacing involved.

"People outside the theater can't believe that you go through a thought process to come up with a musical show."

Lerner admitted that neither of them touched the piano that the elegant Claridge Hotel had installed in Rodgers' suite for their conferences. The hotel also thoughtfully provided Lerner with a room almost next door to Rodgers'.

While the partners were an ocean apart, they discussed problems of casting and the form of the book by telephone or cable.

To Rodgers, these exchanges between artistic mates amount to "courting." He noted that the "honeymoon" only begins during that very special part of a collaboration devoted to composing music and writing lyrics. The romantic comparisons are apt because the Rodgers and Lerner collaboration will be almost as challenging as a marriage.

Rodgers' fair-haired daughter Mary, in her own right a successful composer and the mother of three children, explained why. "Finding a collaborator is rather like dating," she said in an interview in her New York apartment. "You try out many partners, just as you go out with many eligible people, but once you have met the right man you want to hang onto him with a possessiveness that one sees only in good marriages." She also noted that with people of sensitivity "there is no more point in making a comparison with former partners in professional associations than in matrimony."

THIS ARTISTIC marriage is not the first for either Lerner or Rodgers. The composer had more than two decades of happy association with both Hart and Hammerstein. Lerner's partnership with Loewe was a very satisfactory one, and their parting was amicable. During their London skull sessions, however, Lerner kept to a minimum his references to Loewe, and Rodgers likewise soft-pedaled his reminiscences of Hart and Hammerstein.

Lerner's highest praise for Rodgers derives from a comparison between Hart and Hammerstein lyrics. He noted the utter sophistication of Hart's lines:

"Thou swell, thou witty,
Thou sweet, thou grand,
Come kiss me pretty,
Come hold my hand."

He points to the sincerity of these lines by Hammerstein:

"When you walk through a storm keep
your head up high
And don't be afraid of the dark.

At the end of the storm is a golden sky
And the sweet, silver song of a lark."

"Rodgers managed successfully to write music for both," said his new lyricist.

Many of Lerner's friends consider him a synthesis of the best in both Hart and Hammerstein. This has not gone unnoticed by Rodgers, and when they lost their partners, it was immediately Rodgers for Lerner and Lerner for Rodgers.

MARY RODGERS has her own idea of what made Lerner the right collaborator for her father. "He is a very good age," she said. "That half-a-generation removal gives Daddy a fresh point of view. Someone of my age, 30, would be impossible, because he would find it hard to say to Richard Rodgers, 'I don't really like that song.' This would also work the other way, because Daddy would be overly sensitive about criticizing someone so young for fear of inhibiting or frightening him."

Both men sense that the merger is right. They reflect quiet self-assurance about it even at this moment of stress when Lerner is sweating out the writing of the book and Rodgers is at work on his own show.

They admit that their styles have been very different, but as Lerner said: "They will be resolved involuntarily. As soon as we start work we'll mesh instinctively."

Rodgers referred again to their differences in work habits. "Friends of Alan say he's a last-minute worker. I'm not. But I'm sure I can adjust."

Theatergoers, too, will have to do some adjusting to obtain tickets to a musical that probably will be as heavily booked as a combination of "Oklahoma!" and "My Fair Lady." The impact of the two new partners upon each other is going to produce a voice that will be startlingly different from that of Rodgers and Hart, Rodgers and Hammerstein, or Lerner and Loewe.

The perceptive Miss Rodgers put it this way: "A good collaboration is a case of two halves making more than the whole. A score has a personality of its own aside from the individual artistic personalities of the two persons who created it. Lerner has a style, and Rodgers another. But their production will have a Lerner and Rodgers quality that will transcend both."