

DRINKS WITH DEAD PEOPLE

QUARANTINE EDITION

APRIL 22, 2020:

JENNY LIND

Jenny Lind was the hottest concert ticket in America in 1850. But she wasn't everything *The Greatest Showman* may have led you to think.

THE STORY

Despite an unlikely start, Jenny Lind became the darling of European opera. Born out of wedlock and into a dismal childhood, she was admitted to the Royal Theatre in Stockholm as a voice student at the age of nine, and by her tween years was a renowned professional singer. Lind's angelic voice and devotion to philanthropy charmed anyone with ears to hear, and when she retired from the opera circuit in 1849 at the age of 28, her final performance was attended by no less than Queen Victoria.

In a bid for respectability, the entertainer P.T. Barnum lured Lind from retirement to tour America, promising an unprecedented \$1,000 per night for up to 150 nights of performances – with expenses and musical assistants of Lind's choice included. Not only that, Barnum offered to put salaries on deposit up-front, which required him to either sell or mortgage everything he owned.

The movie is right on one thing: the bet paid off. Lind's tour was a complete sensation and brought in the modern equivalent of \$21 million in nine months. There was, however, not a shred of romance between her and her promoter Barnum. Lind – whose wholesome public image was no fiction – was too devoted to her charity work, and Barnum too focused on his business success. In 1852 she married her accompanist Otto Goldschmidt, and they remained happily married until Lind's death in 1887. "We are put together of precisely the same stuff," she wrote with evident satisfaction, "and one of us only needs to begin a sentence before the other know the end of it."

Read on [at the blog](#) for more detail and resources.

DISCUSS:

Lind-mania gripped America in 1850, with merch and concert tickets selling like mad. What's the role of media in this idea of shared experience?

Why do you think Americans went nuts for a Swedish opera singer? And why do you think Lind ultimately agreed to the tour?

What's your favorite song from *The Greatest Showman*?

Hi, I'm Betsy. Stuck at home? Let's learn history together, because the past helps us to understand that we are not alone. Weekday updates during #COVID19.

Questions? Comments? Say hello.

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READ MORE:

C.G. Rosenberg, [Jenny Lind in America](#) (1851)

Primary source: [portrait of Jenny Lind](#) (1847)

Betsy Golden Kellem, "[The Greatest Showman: The True Story of P.T. Barnum and Jenny Lind](#)," *Vanity Fair*, December 22, 2017