

DEUTSCHER LEBENSTIL UND DEUTSCHE KULTUR (Austrian Lifestyle and Culture)

“The Sound of Music” celebrates 50 years

ate in “The Sound of Music” production — after a helicopter’s downdraft had knocked Julie Andrews over, after rain clobbered the schedule and budget, and after an angry farmer poked holes in a man-made brook — the leading lady delivered a tentative prediction.

“This smells as if it might be a success,” Ms. Andrews said.

The 1965 musical was so phenomenally popular that it was nicknamed “The Sound of Money” and dubbed “The Mint.” The movie played in American theaters for 4½ years until the studio withdrew it with plans for a re-issue; the demand in England was so insatiable that the film set a record with 170 weeks at a London theater.

Decades later, while promoting a live CBS presentation of “On Golden Pond” with co-star Christopher Plummer, Ms. Andrews said, “I don’t think either of us knew it would take off that way. ... I guess when you put all those ingredients — beautiful scenery and beautiful music and children and nuns and all of that — together, the only thing that was missing was Lassie, I guess.”

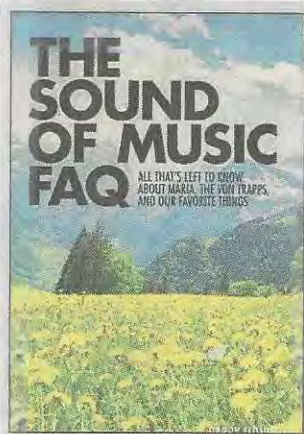
Who needs Lassie when you have nearly 2.5 million Facebook followers and a looming golden anniversary that will revisit the glories of the musical?

For starters, Lady Gaga performed a medley from “The Sound of Music” at last Sunday’s Oscar ceremony and was greeted by Ms. Andrews afterward.

The restored film will return to 500-plus theaters April 19 and 22 (see FathomEvents.com), and Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment will release a five-disc edition March 10 with a new documentary, “The Sound of a City: Julie Andrews Returns to Salzburg.”

The movie also will celebrate its golden anniversary by opening the TCM Classic Film Festival March 26 at the TCL Chinese Theatre in Hollywood where Ms. Andrews and Mr. Plummer are expected for a rare reunion.

A half-century ago, preview audiences accurately



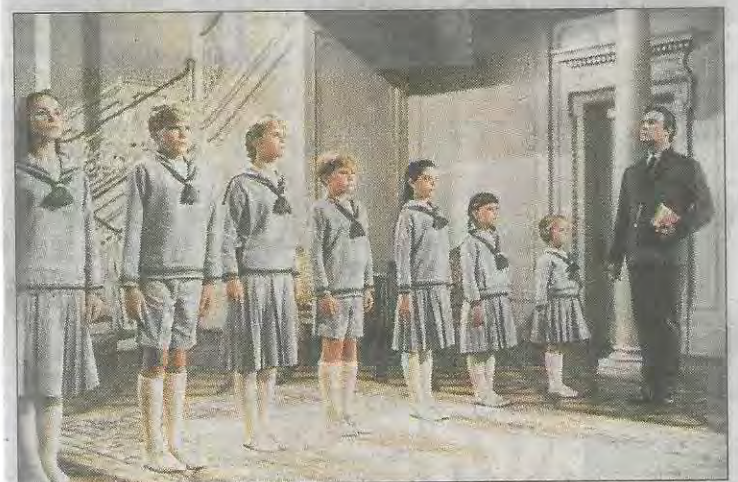
“I loved it in 1965 and I still love it. Every time I see it, it still elevates me,” says Barry Monush, author of “The Sound of Music FAQ” being published March 10.

predicted how most of the world would embrace the movie. After test runs in Minneapolis and Tulsa, 360 audience members rated it excellent; five called it good and no one labeled it fair.

It premiered March 2, 1965, at the Rivoli Theatre on Broadway in front of an audience that included Richard Rodgers, Bette Davis, Salvador Dali and Adlai Stevenson, Richard Stirling’s biography of Ms. Andrews reported. Ms. Davis told the leading lady, “The motion picture business is in love with you!”

“The Sound of Music” movie arrived in Pittsburgh April 7, 1965, and played for 106 weeks at the Nixon Theatre on Liberty Avenue, Downtown. Yes, two years and two weeks of the hills being alive with the sound of music. As with raindrops on roses and whiskers on kittens, bright copper kettles and warm woolen mittens, it was one of Pittsburghers’ favorite things.

It began as a “roadshow” engagement, with reserved seating at a very limited number of theaters, higher prices (\$1.50 to \$3 depending on the day, time and whether



Top: Julie Andrews as Maria in “The Sound of Music.”

Above: Christopher Plummer (far right) as Captain von Trapp with his children.



Left: The 1965 movie musical played in U.S. theaters for 4½ years.

you were in the Nixon’s orchestra, mezzanine or nose-bleeds) and scheduled film start times instead of continuous shows. It also had an intermission, just like a Broadway play.

That is the opposite of the release pattern today, where a movie often will open on as many screens as possible and aim to be the box-office champ for the weekend or longer. A popular film might hold for a couple of months before starting its speedy march to DVD, Blu-ray and on-demand viewing.

“The Sound of Music” was an event, and even by Dec. 18, 1965, it was playing in only 131 of the 14,000-plus theaters in the United States. The movie musical broke records in 80 percent of those U.S. locations, and a Fox

veep famously pointed to Salt Lake City as an example of its success. The city’s population then was 199,300 and yet a theater there sold 309,000 tickets.

The run at the Nixon closed April 18, 1967, to make way for the movie “Thoroughly Modern Millie” also starring Ms. Andrews. For a time, “Sound of Music” displaced “Gone With the Wind” as the domestic box-office champion of all time although it now stands at No. 3 when adjusted for inflation, behind “GWTW” and “Star Wars.”

As for its enduring appeal, Barry Monush, author of “The Sound of Music FAQ” (Applause Theatre & Cinema Books, being published March 10), has no easy or single answer.

“I adore the film. I meet peo-