Wintergreen for President

"Put love in the White House!"

When the Harvard Band trots onto the football field at halftime this fall, it will doubtless play the perennial favorite "Wintergreen for President." That's John P. Wintergreen, of course, the candidate of love, the greatest lover in a love-sick land, whose campaign for president is chronicled in *Of Thee I Sing.* With a story by George S. Kaufman and Morrie Ryskind and music and lyrics by George and Ira Gershwin, the show opened in 1931, ran for 441 performances, and won the Pulitzer Prize for the best American play of 1932, the first musical ever to win a Pulitzer.

"Never has there been such a belaboring of our self-seeking and pettifogging government," wrote Brooks Atkinson '17, theater critic of the *New York Times.* He called the musical "a taut and lethal satire....It attacks with the rapier and the club indiscriminately....It is funnier than the government, and not nearly so dangerous."

When Wintergreen and party bosses decide to make love his platform, they stage a beauty contest, the winner to be Miss White House or perhaps more ("If a girl is sexy, She may be Mrs. Prexy"). But Wintergreen refuses to court Miss White House—which ultimately brings the United States to the brink of war with France—because he meets Mary Turner, a secretary, and falls in love with her corn muffins. They take the oath of office and marry simultaneously, and the rest is history.

Shown here, from the Harvard Theatre Collection, are original-production items documenting the administration: from the top, the suave Wintergreen (played by William Gaxton) poses with his vice president, the uproariously useless Alexander Throttlebottom (Victor Moore); a flyer with prancing Supreme Court justices; Mary (Lois Moran) and the boys assume a patriotic position; President Wintergreen and the First Lady, at their double desk in the White House, settle momentous affairs of state; and sheet music to the title song ("Of thee I sing, baby, Summer, Autumn, Winter, Spring, baby, You're my silver lining, You're my sky of blue; There's a love light shining, Just because of you").

Other grand old songs from the show include "Who Could Ask for Anything More?" "Who Cares?" and "Love Is Sweeping the Country," sung with confidence by the politicians near the end of the first act: "Love is sweeping the country, Waves are hugging the shore. All the sexes From Maine to Texas Have never known such love before. See them billing and cooing Like the birdies above. Each girl and boy a-like, Sharing joy a-like, Feels that passion-'ll Soon be national. Love is sweeping the country, There never was so much love."

Images courtesy of the Harvard Theatre Collection