

# Susan Watson

**Susan Watson** (born December 17, 1938) is an American actress and singer best known for her roles in musical theatre.


Watson's first professional role was Velma in the original West End production of *West Side Story* in 1958. She created the role of Luisa in *The Fantasticks* and then played Kim on Broadway in *Bye Bye Birdie*, beginning in 1960. Among many other roles in musicals, she was nominated for a Tony Award for the role of Jenny in *A Joyful Noise* (1966). She starred in the title role of the Broadway revival of *No, No Nanette* in 1971. Watson also appeared in several television series and specials.

## Biography

Born in Tulsa, Oklahoma, Watson was one of five children of a geologist/geophysicist and a dance instructor. From an early age her life was filled with the music of Gilbert and Sullivan and Rodgers and Hammerstein. As a teenager she performed in summer stock before being accepted at the Juilliard School in Manhattan. Her studies there were interrupted when she accepted a role as Velma and understudy for Maria in the original West End production of *West Side Story* in 1958.

Stopping in Paris after the show's run, Watson met her future

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sister-in-law, who was dating Tom Jones and urged Watson to contact him when she arrived in New York City. Jones and partner Harvey Schmidt cast her in the lead role of Louisa, "The Girl", in their one-act musical *The Fantasticks*, which ran for one week in 1959, at Barnard College's Minor Latham Playhouse, while the creative team tried to raise financing for an off-Broadway production. While biding her time, Watson appeared in a revue entitled *Follies of 1910*. Gower Champion, who was in the process of casting *Bye Bye Birdie*, noticed Watson in *Follies* and offered her a role. She played the role of Kim throughout the entire Broadway run (April 1960 – October 1961). She finally returned to *The Fantasticks* when it was televised by the Hallmark Hall of Fame in 1964.

Following a national tour of *Carnival*, Watson returned to New York to play opposite Robert Preston in *Ben Franklin in Paris* (1964), a Lincoln Center revival of *Carousel* (1965) as Carrie with John Raitt and Jerry Orbach, a New York City Center staging of *Where's Charley?*, and Jenny in the short-lived musical *A Joyful Noise* (1966) (again with Raitt), for which she was nominated for a Tony Award for Best Performance by a Featured Actress in a Musical.

Watson reunited with Jones and Schmidt for their musical *Celebration*, which opened on Broadway in January 1969 at the Ambassador Theatre and played in *Beggar on Horseback* (1970) in repertory at the Vivian Beaumont Theater at Lincoln Center before taking on the title role in the Broadway revival of *No*,

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*No Nanette* (1971) with Ruby Keeler. She appeared at the William Inge Theatre Festival in Independence, Kansas, in a tribute to Jones and Schmidt on April 25, 2009.


## Later years

Watson's television credits include several episodes of the *Bell Telephone Hour* (1964–1966) and guest appearances on the television series *Newhart* (1982), *St. Elsewhere* (1984), *Wings* (1993), and the soap opera *General Hospital* (1987). She is one of dozens of Broadway musical performers in the documentary *Broadway: Beyond the Golden Age*, scheduled for broadcast on PBS in 2010. Watson is a founding member of the Musical Theatre Guild, a group of professionals who perform musicals at the Pasadena Playhouse, California.

She was back on Broadway for the first time in many years in 2011. Watson performed the featured role of Emily Whitman in the revival of *Follies*, which ran from August 2011 to January 2012 at the Marquis Theatre. She sang "Rain on the Roof" with Don Correia. Watson also performed in the run at the Kennedy Center in May 2011 to June 2011.

In 2016, she released an album of 14 Broadway and jazz standards, titled *The Music Never Ends*.

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## Family

Watson and her husband, producer Norton Wright, live in Sherman Oaks, California. They are the parents of two adult sons.

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