What is a Musical? - Lecture

Musical Theatre has been a part of my life since I was 6 years old and I saw my brother play El Gallo in *The Fantasticks*. It was at that moment when I heard him sing

that I knew I wanted to follow in my brother’s footsteps. ( any chance you recognize the singer in this clip? From *Law and Order* - or if you're an 80s movie fan *Dirty Dancing*?)

What is it about musical theatre that inspires our imagination and fills our hearts? Is that they are entertaining? Provocative? Educational? Is it the music that sends tingles up and down our arms? Or the lyrics that give us insight to characters or move forward the plot? Hopefully, all of these things come affect us and make an impact on our lives. Either for fun or social change.

So what is a musical? It is not a play with music. We have those. *Peter and The Starcatcher, Indecent, Spokesong, The Dead, Blue Window*has a song that is sung in the show. Often *The Grapes of Wrath* has a band on stage and many more. Notice how the names of the shows are italicized? When you write the title of a play or a musical – or a play with music – make sure you italicize the show.

One style of musical, like *Guys and Dolls* or *Wicked,* have what is called a book. These are all the words that are spoken. Scenes that go on until music is needed. The songs have music and lyrics. Hopefully, they come out of an intense need to heighten what is happening in the show. There is no other choice but to sing! Often the songs move the plot forward, or give you the background to a character, or gives one insight into how the character is feeling. When Tony sees Maria in *West Side Story* and dances with her, shortly after they are separated and he sings of her. His heart is full and he is fallen deeply, madly in love and sings the iconic song

Sometimes the songs are merely there for entertainment. from Music Man fits this category. You cannot have too many songs that are just to entertain or the musical falls down. More on that later this quarter.

You also have what we call Sung through Musicals. These are the musicals like *Les Misérables.* *Jesus Christ Superstar* (not called that at the time- it was the first of it’s kind!), *Falsettos, Last Five Years, Cats, Evita,* and*Hamilton.*There are others that have very few scenes or scattered lines (*Phantom of the Opera*)

So, in short,  a musical is a story with scenes and songs aka Book, Lyrics, and Music.

# Definitions: Book, Music, and Lyrics - Oh my!

Most musicals are made up of a Book, Music, And Lyrics. UNLESS it is a Sung Through Musical then it has no book or just a couple of spoken sentences here and there.

Book - The spoken words, dialogue (two or more speakers) and monologues ( where only one person is speaking for a prolonged amount of time)

( Libretto: the text of a work (such as an opera) for the musical theater. 2 : the book containing a **libretto**. Often this contains the written out lyrics but not the sheet music)

Music - an arrangement of sounds having melody, rhythm and sometimes harmony

Lyrics - words that are set to music

**Some**musical theatre terms.

Book Musical: A musical with a book.

Broadway – A theatre District in New York

Button: The big moment at the end of the song. Really obvious stop, finish. When the song is “Buttoned up”

Cast album: or “Original Cast album – NOT “Soundtrack ( those are movies). A recording of the stage production of a musical.

Choreographer- the person who designs the dance movements.

Chorus. “background” performers. Singers and Dancers. In larger musicals you have both a Singing Chorus and a Dancing Chorus.

Company – The full cast of a show.

Concept Musical: A musical where the idea is more important than the plot. Think A Chorus Line.

A Chorus Line:  One of Bradetta’s Favorite musicals…..

OH You wanted more?

From Wiki:

**A Chorus Line** is a [musical (Links to an external site.)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Musical_theatre) with music by [Marvin Hamlisch (Links to an external site.)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marvin_Hamlisch), lyrics by [Edward Kleban (Links to an external site.)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Kleban), and a book by [James Kirkwood Jr. (Links to an external site.)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Kirkwood_Jr.) and [Nicholas Dante (Links to an external site.)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicholas_Dante).

Set on the bare stage of a Broadway theater, the musical is centered on seventeen [Broadway (Links to an external site.)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Broadway_theatre) [dancers (Links to an external site.)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dancer) [auditioning (Links to an external site.)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Audition_(performing_arts)) for spots on a [chorus line (Links to an external site.)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chorus_line). A Chorus Line provides a glimpse into the personalities of the performers and the choreographer, as they describe the events that have shaped their lives and their decisions to become dancers.

Every Little Step is the documentary of the casting process during the re-mount of A Chorus Line in 2008. GREAT documentary if you are an actor with a dream of performing on Broadway!

Cult Musical – A Choru-   (  I jest. Chorus Line ran forever) … Often a flop that weirdly – A lot of people love and follow. Rocky Horror Picture Show, The original “Carrie: The Musical” had such a great following after such a flop, that they re-wrote it a bit and now it is done a lot.

Create, or Originate a Role: musicals, Like Wicked, run for a long time. Or they close on Broadway and move to regional theatres and High Schools. But the first person to play the role is considered to have “Created the Role”.

Featured Performer: Not the star but someone or a role important enough to be a named character and get their name mentioned separately in the credits.

A Flop: Musical that lost money. Not necessarily a bad musical. Sondheim had a couple but they have “Cult followings”.

Ingenue: Young, pretty, vulnerable female lead. Think Sandy in Grease.

Musical Play – A play… that has music numbers… lots of them…but isn’t considered a musical…. Yeah…

Reprise: A repetition of a song sung earlier in the musical. Often with different lyrics but not always.

Rock Musical: A musical that uses rock rather than Broadway music.

Triple Threat – They sing, dance and act! Really well. ( Quadruple threat – they also write or produce)

# Origin Story: A BRIEF History of Musical Theatre 1700-1957

Origin Story:

A Brief History of Musical Theatre

Centuries before Musical Theatre as we know it today came into being there was the Opera. Music and story have always been an enchanting couple. The music serves to elevate the words, heighten the drama and infuse comedy with nuance at times and a hammer over the head at others. Even without the lyrics, the music points the listener down the path the writers want you to take. It is light and fanciful, or slow, rich, and sometimes in a minor key. More on this in a future lecture, including a foray into what it is like when the writers break this rule.

In my opinion, it is important when we talk about Musical Theatre to talk about “straight” theatre. Straight theatre simply means a play without music. It has nothing to do with sexual identity. The other element we cannot ignore is politics. Theatre at its heart is political and more often than not - dissent. Sprinkled with a lot entertainment of course. We as humans have been telling stories since we lived in caves, we know this because we have found the painting and etchings speaking of the hunt, of danger, of fire, of wars, and of joy and celebration.

Let’s start with some events and dates then as the quarter moves on we will dive a bit deeper.

1770s Musicals themselves, as I stated above found it roots in Opera

1800s

* The colonial Era – in the new Americas - Wickquasgeck Trail circuit
* 1866 – The Black Crook. Started as a play with very little or no singing, dealt with the Cristian story of redemption for a hero who had become ensnared by satanic forces but was saved by a pure woman. Ironically there was public outcry. The New York Herald review stated “Nothing in any Christian Country or, in modern times has approached the indecent…exhibition at “Wheatly’s…Almost nude females….are brought out boldly before the public if ( readers of the Herald ) are determined to gaze on the indecent and dazzling brilliancy of The Black Crook, they should provide themselves with a piece of smoked glass”
* The American variety in minstrel shows – expect a lecture in the South Pacific Module
  + This in turn led to the more “refined” vaudeville and the “rowdy” burlesque
  + Extravaganza
  + Pantomime

Crossing over the late 1800s to the 1900s

* Tin Pan Alley
* Ragtime
* 1904 – Little Johnny Jones (by Cohan) – Irish Need Not Apply era
* 1920s – Cole Porter, Gershwin, Rogers, and Hart make their composing debuts.
* 1927 – Show Boat (Kern and Hammerstein)– in my opinion (not mine alone) the musical that is the foundation for the structure of the modern musical. It has been touted as “ A game-changer” . Revolutionary for so many reasons.
  + First, it combined a serious topic with high production values and spectacle.
  + Show Boat addressed the social issues of its time – black racism and social evolution.
  + Show Boat was the first musical on Broadway that integrated a black and white cast when segregation was still normal and blatant in America. Yes - we will talk about this and how it relates to current events.
* The 30s – The Great Depression and World War II but Broadway kept going. It also became very patriotic!
* 1934 – Anything Goes
* 1938 – The Cradle Will Rock – by Bliztzstein and Brecht Federal Theatre Project.
  + A musical that directly talked about unionization. Before any workers rights, the 40 hour week, pay negotiations
* 1943 – Oklahoma! By Rogers and Hammerstein
  + “Oh, What a Beautiful Morning” a song from the show. Imagine if you will only seeing musicals that started with big dance numbers, and uplifting, up-tempo driving songs. Glitzy, lots of spectacles, beautiful men and women sometimes scantily clothed. Then Oklahoma – you are in the theatre watching the curtain rise on an old woman on a porch churning butter. You hear from offstage a deep SINGLE baritone voice sing “Oh What A Beautiful Morning, Oh What a Beautiful Day, I’ve Got a Beautiful Feeling, Everything’s Going My Way...

And thus a musical theatre rule was shattered.

* “The Farmer and The Cowman Should Be Friends” a song from the show dealt with the hostilities over territories and states over the rights of Land Use.
* “I’m Just A Girl Who Can’t Say No” a song from the show declared a woman’s mind who had her own agency and desires.
* Did I mention this was 1943?
* 1950 - Guys and Dolls, with music and lyrics by Loesser and book by Jo Swerling and Abe Borrows
  + **Book-** the dialogue that the actors speak
  + **Lyrics**-Words set to music, often in rhyme
* 1957 – Music Man – Meredith Wilson
* 1957 – West Side Story – Bernstein

I am going to stop the list at 1957 for the first half of this module. Why then are we jumping to Into The Woods by Steven Sondheim? Honestly, I have learned the hard way that most students do not have the books until about 7-14 days into the quarter. Especially now with Covid-19 where I can’t say – “well walk into our bookstore and pick it up”! Expecting you to have all these books on the first day of the quarter didn’t seem reasonable.  You can find Into The Woods online to watch. That link is in your syllabus and on your required books page.

I want you to take a moment and look back over the list I have provided. It is by no means a complete list of musicals from this time. But they are some of the most famous. As we move through the quarter we will talk about the structure of the musical, why the structure works, how do you break the structure, and still have a successful musical?

You may look back at this and ask – “Wow, why are there so many political issues in these musicals.” Ah, great question. One we will be talking about all quarter because it is AMERICAN MUSICAL THEATRE HISTORY! And the theatre is a very political arena as I said at the beginning of the lecture.

Theatre and Musical Theatre are also incredibly diverse. That does not mean theatre doesn’t have a bias, and issues – it does. A lot of times they put those biases right on stage and explore them. In Scot Miller’s “Strike Up The Band”  a study of musical theatre not musical, he tells a story where a friend asked him “Scot, why are there so many Gay people in theatre”. His answer: There are gay people everywhere, this is just one place where they have been accepted and encouraged to express themselves. Where they feel safe.”

Jewish, Immigrants, The Irish, People of Color, Feminist, Religious, Atheist, Differently Abled, Different Sized and Neuro-Diverse people and many others I am sure I haven’t mentioned have found a voice in the theatre and SOME representation in the theatre. Not always an equitable one. We are still working on those issues and making progress every year – I hope.  However, it where a lot of people who do not feel like they fit into mainstream society find themselves drawn. It is where people who are bursting to tell stories are drawn. The theatre has writers, designers, musicians, builders - you name it.

Also, almost always – before you see you an issue on a bill or becoming law before you see it on TV or a Film – you see the issue dressed for entertainment – at the theatre. And often with Song and Dance.

Other musicals that I may not explore as deeply as I will the above but good for you to know about:

Strike up the Band, Wizard of Oz ( film) This is the Army, Yankee Doodle Dandy, Holiday Inn, Meet Me In St. Louis, Annie Get Your Gun, An American in Paris, Damn Yankees, Li’l Abner, On Your Toes, Of The I Sing, Rose-Marie, I’d Rather Be Right, Paly Joey, Girl Crazy, Babes in Arms,

Citation:

My general knowledge

Miller, Scott. Strike Up the Band: A New History of Musical Theatre. 10.10.2006, Heinemann Drama, 2006.

Wollman, Elizabeth, et al. A Critical Companion to the American Stage Musical (Critical Companions). Critical, Methuen Drama, 2017.

Knapp, Raymond. The American Musical and the Formation of National Identity. Princeton University Press, 2006.

The New York Herald – 1866 Archives

Sondheim - Lecture

Stephen Sondheim

by Bradetta Vines

West Side Story and Gypsy. These were Sondheim’s first ventures into the Broadway world under the mentorship of Oscar Hammerstein and Leonard Bernstein. We know that Sondheim wrote the lyrics for these musicals. The rumors have been rampant for years that he also helped with the music for WSS, but nothing has ever been confirmed and most doubt that Sondheim would ever confirm that out of respect for the then aging, now deceased Bernstein.

Stephen Sondheim was born on March 22, 1930. He began studying piano and organ at a young age and started songwriting when he attended the George School. He was brave enough to ask for honest feedback from his mentor, Hammerstein on a parody he wrote called *By George!* Let’s just say, he was very honest and Sondheim felt it was invaluable. Sondheim went on to work as his assistant in 1947 and … He kept on working.

He has won Tony Awards, Grammy Awards, Olivier Awards, and was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by Barack Obama. He has won 39 awards total so this is just a small sample.

Sondheim has written several of musicals I consider my favorite. *West Side Story, Gypsy*, *Assassins,* and .... *Into the Woods*. Some of my favorite musical theatre songs come from these musicals and some of his musicals, which are not my faves. Like “The Millers Son” from *A Little Night Music*, The end of Act 1 in Sunday and the Park with George,” Johanna” and “A Little Priest” from *Sweeny Todd.*

He is a song master. His music is complex and too hard for even him to play sometimes. The complexity of the music either hits your ear immediately, takes a couple of listens, or some people never fall in love and move on to other composers. For me, *Into the Woods*and *Assassins* immediately hit my ear and I went away humming the tunes. Not true for all people. Sondheim is famous for getting producers to beg him to write some “humma-mamumma-mamum-mable-melodies. For me sis other musicals took many, many listens  to ingrain the melody into my head. His lyrics are also complex, as Corliss from Time magazine states “They have to be heard twice on the cast album after the show closed.”

Sondheim wrote two books about himself and his work. Finishing the Hat (1954-1981) and Look, I Made A Hat ( 1981-2011). These are lyrics from “Finishing the Hat” in *Sunday in the Park With George*” I want to share a couple of insights these books gave me about him. Ideas that he shared that make me admire him all the more. But also gave me just ONE insight into why Sondheim is one of the best musical creators we will ever have.

Before I share this first one you need to know, I love pop music and I actually love “Near rhymes”  Example Swim and Skin sound similar but they are not EXACT rhymes. Swim and Trim as Skin and fin because they end the same and the emphasis lands. You must do both to have a perfect rhyme. Sondheim – to put it mildly- does not.

He quotes composer X, (yes that is what he calls the composer because he refuses to insult anyone – Directly- in these books) in “Finishing The Hat” the book

X was being interviewed was asked how he felt about critics might get picky about the fact that your rhymes are not always “True’ Ones. He replied:

I hate all true rhymes. I think they only allow you a certain limited range…I’m not a great believer in perfect rhymes. I’m just a believer in feelings that come across. If the craft gets in the way of feelings, then I‘ll take the feelings any day”

He says more but I must stop to say that while I like near rhymes I think X MIGHT be correct - in lesser person's hands, but not in Sondheim’s. He never sacrifices story or feeling for rhymes that is part of what makes him SO brilliant.

Sondheim goes on to say that

 “Allowing for x’s dismissal of every first-rate lyricist from Berlin to Hammerstein as having a limited range, x is nevertheless not the only songwriter to voice this defense of laziness: I reprint it simply because it’s the most articulate one that I’ve come across the notion that good rhymes and the expression of contradictory qualities, That neatness equals lifelessness is, to borrow a disapproving phrase from my old counterpoint text “the refuge of the destitute. Claiming that true rhyme is the enemy of substance is the sustaining excuse of lyricists who are unable to rhyme well with any consistency.”

“….**Craft is supposed to serve feelings. A good lyric should not only have something to say but a way of saying as clearly and forcefully as possible and that involves rhyming cleanly**. “

I bolded this last line because I want you to remember that Sondheim said this. I also want you to remember my first lecture that we are going to discuss the rules of the musical, and or writing songs for a musical. Then we are going to talk about some great musicals – that break those rules.

Some key elements to take away about Sondheim

* He is considered a genius even by those who don’t always like his work
* People seem to love his work or hate it
* His work is beloved by many
* His work is complex
* There is a long-standing fan feud Sondheim vs. Webber ( Cats, Phantom)
* He has had major flops on Broadway
* Some of his biggest flops have cult followings.
* Some of his flops were flops the first time – but when they were remounted they were huge successes
* He has won a lot of awards.
* He has very specific rules and he follows them.
* He is a master storyteller.
* Everything he writes is VERY specific. There is always a reason.
* He is obsessed with puzzles and he gives them as gifts.

# Lapine- Lecturette

**Lapine Short Lecture**

by Bradetta Vines

**James Elliot Lapine** (born January 10, 1949) is an American stage director, playwright, screenwriter, and librettist. He has won the Tony Award for Best Book of a Musical three times, for Into the Woods, Falsettos, and Passion. He has frequently collaborated with Stephen Sondheim and William Finn. (  Source - my brain and Wiki)

Lapine has done so much amazing work. We will learn more about him and William Finn later in the quarter. He has mostly worked with Sondheim and Finn. He has also done some amazing work for Sesame street!

Into The Woods - Lecture

Into The Woods Lecture

by Bradetta Vines

Hopefully, you have read or watched *Into The Woods (ITW)*before reading this short lecture. I am keeping it short so I leave you something to talk about when you write your response to the discussion questions. I do want to give you a little more context for the show.

Into The Woods, the 1988 Tony Award winner for both Score and Book of a musical, is a brilliantly conceived exploration of what happens after “happily ever after.” The show, which has an enchanting, moving, and profound score by Stephen Sondheim, and a powerful, witty book by James Lapine, opened on Broadway on November 5, 1987, at the Martin Beck Theatre under the direction of Mr. Lapine. ( MTI)

BRIEF HISTORY of a main event 1987 that influenced Sondheim:

*ITW*was produced at the height of the AIDS crisis in the United States in 1987. Also the year I graduated from High School - so I have very clear memories of that time. There was this pandemic, AIDS, that was killing a lot of people. As a theatre person, I lost a lot of friends. You see when AIDS first presented itself the government didn't care. They ignored it and called it a "gay" disease and said it would go away. Even if it didn't homosexuals were disposal, not really a valued part of society. The government had very little interest once Doctors did identify the cause, in curing the disease. Even though the disease could easily have been stopped in its tracks if people had worn protection.  And surprisingly it didn't just affect homosexual men.  People who were diagnosed were ostracized and socially distancing wasn't an issue. Even though people knew blood or other bodily fluids had to be exchanged to contract the disease - the fear was rampant.

So re-cap. Pandemic, a certain population were supposedly the only people who could catch it and they were thought of as disposable, the government denied it was a big deal and failed to act to protect people, easily protected against by wearing protection - Millions died.

It is important that you have this context to understand the themes, Sondheim and Lapin were addressing and why. "Sondheim and Lapine bring us through a maze that mirrors the complexity of everyday existence. Like the characters in Into The Woods, we end this journey aware of the moral consequences of our actions and the power of tolerance, community, and shared sacrifice. "

It is a POWERFUL message dressed in fun songs, beautiful music, and FAMILIAR characters.

HOWEVER let me be clear. Sondheim does not say it is about AIDS. He does call it a study on society and community. There has been a lot discussion on this over the years since it first premiered on Broadway.

Stephen Sondheim wrote a musical based on some Grimm fairytale characters and a made up story ( the Baker and his Wife). Please note in the first act unless you are familiar with Grimm's original fairytales they may have held a bit of horror for you ( cutting off heels and such).  This was Grimm's original version, not our beloved Disney ( I do like my happy endings).

Sondheim and Lapine had read "The Uses of Enchantments" by Bettlehiem (if you dig deeper you will find this gentleman is not without his controversy but he is not our focus). This is book looked at the darker sides of Grimms Fairytales ( yes - they could get even darker!) and beyond the very few "Happily Ever After" stories the brothers wrote. Bettlehiem dug into the deep psychology of the fairytale. So did Sondheim and Lapine.

Back to pandemics: One of the major themes of ITW is the community, the world, sacrifice or scapegoating, care of community, or isolation. One of the original questions asked in 1987 by the theatre's education department was:

"Can you think of instances when disasters have caused members of communities to respond selfishly? Can you think of examples when the opposite has been the case?"

Here are some other questions Sondheim asked his audience when they first released *ITW*.

* "What is truth?
* What is a lie?
* What is the difference between a small lie and a big lie?
* Some of the characters in *Into The Woods* freely employ deceit to accomplish their goals. Is lying ever justified?
* **How does deceit contribute to the downfall of the community**?
* Is the presence of deceit inevitable in human relationships?

The one I bolded was directly aimed at the lies President Ronald Regan was telling that allowed the needless spread of AIDS.

The last question I will share with you from there education department is:

"Write an essay about individual responsibility for a major community problem such as homelessness, hunger, water pollution, **or the care of patients with AIDS."**

These questions are for you to think about - they are not our discussion question for the week, but if you explore these questions, they could inform your answers in our assigned discussion. I think they give insight into what Sondheim and Lapin were trying to tell people.

At the end of Act 1 everything seems blissful and looks like we will have our happy ending - but in Act 2 we see the consequences of the choices that the character's made in the first act. We also see the maturation that all the characters make - or do not make.

It is a cautionary tale. It points us in the direction of solutions. A complicated solution.  More about that in the discussion prompt.

# Module 3 Part 1 Lecture 1 - Some 50s culture.

1950’s . Five years early World War II had ended. Women had been part of the workforce in numbers the United States had never seen before. When the men returned home women were expected to return to the home and be stay at home take care of their husbands and have children. This was before women realized that doing so could be a choice, but the workforce was also a choice.  For some.

Women who were born to wealth were lucky enough to also have an education. Many others were lucky to attend school past the 8th grade. This is not to say women didn’t work. They were field hands (my grandmother picked cotton) secretaries, teachers, and nurses. But they had a “Place” and they were expected to stay there. After WWII that started to change. The 50s become a struggle for identity. Not just for women but for men.

Men were expected to provide for their wives and children. However, many men were experiencing Shell-Shock. We now refer to it as Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome. It was a time when emotions were seen as week. Therapy meant you were crazy, so asking for help was taboo. Failing at being a father and husband were socially unacceptable. You’re wife worked? As a man, you either weren’t a proper provider or you were emasculated because “You didn’t wear the pants in the family”.

Segregation still existed. People of color and immigrants were legally discriminated against. Their education was also a low priority. Jobs and housing were often hard to find because if you were “colored” they had every legal right to reject you. Many who did find work found it in menial labor and were always paid less than their white counterparts. Again, there are exceptions to this rule, but this was the norm in America.

Now, of course, there were people who did not live by these rules, but they were by far the minority. They were also the seeds planting ideas of change and what could be if we moved toward and equitable society.

Some writers tried to re-enforce the norms and keep everyone in their place. South Pacific as you know now - did not.

As much as I love Guys and Dolls, this was one of them – for the most part. Guys and Dolls showed a woman, Sarah Brown, who was pious and good and could change her man from a gambling sinner to a good man of society. Sky Masterson who had it all, except for a good woman and real job. Ah but wait. Then there is Nathan and Adelaide. A woman who supported herself for all of her adult life. As a dancer. Not a profession that was looked on kindly. Rich men could attend those shows with little fear of reproach, but burlesque, stripping and even legitimate stage work was frowned upon in “Good Society” and no “decent woman” worked in those professions. But, in Guys and Dolls, it all works out in the end “Marry the man today and change his ways, Tomorrow.” One of the most famous songs from this show.

Thus, Frank Lessor showed some of the other options men and women in American society had, but with a bent toward moving back toward the mainstream acceptable way of life.

The King and I.  A widowed woman who must make her way in the world. The musical shows the east as westerners want to see them. Also with a touch more compassion. In reality, the young lovers in the show when they are found out, the man is executed and the woman beaten and returned to the harem. But the lead, Anna, is strong and almost powerful. Yes, she is a teacher, but she sits with royalty, she makes her own way in the world. She is independent. Yes, in the context of the roles mainstream America would accept at the time. Still. She was a strong female character. Sadly, the show was also a representation of a very white America. The Asian roles, including the King, were often played by white men. It wasn’t until the last 20 years that we have fixed that. [*The King and I (Links to an external site.)*](https://www.broadway.com/shows/king-and-i/) is now cast properly and directed with the attitudes of the 21st Century.

[*The Fantasticks (Links to an external site.)*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lOkGbRMF8EQ)*[](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lOkGbRMF8EQ)*and [*West Side Story (Links to an external site.)*](https://www.broadway.com/shows/west-side-story/?gclid=CjwKCAjwibzsBRAMEiwA1pHZrlh1KyguPkkgJpcIBCsjV3QOXO_dFUuodp2j1yEEszAagoAdKn7OzhoCyk4QAvD_BwE) were perhaps the most revolutionary mainstream in the musicals. The Fantasticks spends the entire show revealing the atrocities of the world and how we look at suffering through rose-colored glasses. It arrives at the conclusion that love, and honesty and as the parents make a move to go back to their old ways by re-building the wall, El Gallio reminds them of the lessons they just learned and the choose to remain open and work through difficulties while rekindling their friendships and learn to work with each other. The young lovers move forward with a deeper understanding of love and accept that while romance exists, so does work to keep that love and romance alive.

[*West Side Story (Links to an external site.)*](https://www.broadway.com/shows/west-side-story/?gclid=CjwKCAjwibzsBRAMEiwA1pHZrlh1KyguPkkgJpcIBCsjV3QOXO_dFUuodp2j1yEEszAagoAdKn7OzhoCyk4QAvD_BwE) confronts racism and the issues of discrimination toward all immigrants no matter their race. It also highlights that when one group makes an upward move in society, they feel the need to find another to keep out, lest they lose. The writers explore the fear that was prevalent in America at the time and sadly the lesson has still not been learned 70 years later. The idea that there is enough for everyone and that working together is a stronger choice than oppression and killing is not realized until a tragic end. This lesson has been taught since the times of Shakespeare, his play [*Romeo and Juliet, (Links to an external site.)*](https://www.broadway.com/shows/romeo-and-juliet/) as you read is the source material for [*West Side Story (Links to an external site.)*](https://www.broadway.com/shows/west-side-story/?gclid=CjwKCAjwibzsBRAMEiwA1pHZrlh1KyguPkkgJpcIBCsjV3QOXO_dFUuodp2j1yEEszAagoAdKn7OzhoCyk4QAvD_BwE) with a few artistic changes.

This directly reflected what was happening in American Culture. Neighbors were moving next door and perhaps they did not look like you, maybe they did not grow up in the USA. They ate different food. They had different religious beliefs. They had a different educational background. Sometimes, they looked like the people you went to war against.

These musicals helped audiences put a human face to the changing America. They helped people stop and think before they acted out of hate. The seeds were planted. Sometimes they died in the ground but more often they grew and bloomed. You’ll see this theme a lot of the rest of the quarter.

Entertainment as a means of social change. But don’t forget – no matter how serious the subject matter These musicals are indeed entertaining. So follow the links and listen or read a bit more about these gems. The music is beautiful.

# South Pacific -The Writers of the Musical and The Book

From Lincoln Center

The Writers: **Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II With Richard Rodger**s composing the music and Oscar Hammerstein II writing the words, Rodgers and Hammerstein became perhaps the most successful writing team in the history of musical theater.

Through a series of groundbreaking shows throughout the 1940’s and 1950’s, they changed the face of the American theater. Richard Rodgers (1902–1979), achieved fame through twenty years of writing songs, from the 1920’s through the early 1940’s, with lyricist Lorenz Hart. Together they wrote more than 40 lighthearted, sophisticated musical comedies, including On Your Toes, Babes in Arms, The Boys from Syracuse, I Married an Angel and Pal Joey. At the same time, Oscar Hammerstein II (1895–1960) became famed for his work writing the words for operettas, or “light opera” which had its roots in 19th century Europe. He collaborated with a number of composers, including Rudolf Friml and Sigmund Romberg.

The shows he wrote include The Desert Song, Rose-Marie and The New Moon. He tackled many challenging issues in his work, including racial issues. Show Boat, written in 1927 with Jerome Kern, and Carmen Jones, was an all-black revisiting of Georges Bizet’s tragic opera Carmen.

Rodgers and Hammerstein first collaborated in 1943 on Oklahoma!, a show that is widely considered to be the first true musical play, combining elements of musical comedy and operetta to create a more integrated, dramatic musical form than had been seen before. Their subsequent works include

Carousel, Allegro, South Pacific, The King and I, Me and Juliet, Pipe Dream, Flower Drum Song and The Sound of Music.

They also wrote the movie musical, State Fair, and for television, Cinderella. Rodgers and Hammerstein’s musicals won many honors, including a total of 35 Tony Awards, 15 Academy Awards, 2 Pulitzer Prizes, 2 Grammy Awards and 2 Emmy Awards.

Oscar Hammerstein II died in 1960, but Rodgers continued to write for the Broadway stage. No Strings, the first show he wrote without a partner, won Tony Awards for both music and lyrics. He followed it with Do I Hear a Waltz?, Two by Two, Rex and I Remember Mama, which opened on Broadway in 1979, only a few months before Rodgers died.

The Co-Author: Joshua Logan Joshua Logan brought the idea for South Pacific to Rodgers and Hammerstein, although originally he only intended to be the show’s director. But Hammerstein found himself having trouble writing military jargon and Logan, who had served in the military, offered to help. Although, at this point Hammerstein had not co-written a libretto for almost 20 years, he discovered that Logan was a helpful sounding board. And so Logan became Hammerstein’s co-author. Joshua Logan was born in Texarkana, Texas in 1908 and became a leading director, writer, and producer in theater and in movies. He attended Princeton University but left before graduating to study with the famous Russian director and acting teacher, Konstantin Stanislavsky in Moscow.

**The Book that inspired the Musical**

The Novelist:

James Michener James Michener wrote the original book, Tales of the South Pacific, which Richard Rodgers, Oscar Hammerstein II, and Joshua Logan adapted into South Pacific.

James Michener was born in New York City in 1907 and grew up in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. His first career was teaching teachers, after which he edited textbooks until he joined the Navy during World War II.

As a lieutenant junior grade, he was stationed at Espiritu Santo in the South Pacific. When he returned, he published Tales of the South Pacific, based on his wartime experiences, and the book’s success began his career as one of America’s leading authors.

Tales of the South Pacific won Michener the 1948 Pulitzer Prize, and was, of course, the basis for South Pacific. Over the next 40 years, he wrote 23 novels, 5 art books, a book of sonnets, and literally hundreds of articles, introductions, contributions to collections, and other works. He became particularly known for well-researched historical fiction, such as Hawaii, Chesapeake, Space, Texas, and Alaska. Michener also ran for Congress and took on political roles including serving as a cultural ambassador to many countries.

He was a member of the Advisory Council to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the advisory committee of the U.S. Postal Service. In addition to his Pulitzer Prize, Michener received many honors, including the Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian award given by the United States, and an award from the President’s Committee on the Arts and Humanities.

He died in 1997, at age 90

# WWII

If you know nothing about The US involvement in WWII, This [PBS series (Links to an external site.)](https://www.pbs.org/thewar/) is a great resource. You might want to check it out.

This orientation to the history of when South Pacific is set is crucial to understand and analyze the script and understand the characters.

If you are familiar let me review in broad strokes and supplement some information you may or may not know. The Stock Market crash of 1929 and threw us into The Great Depression made worse by the Dust Bowl. FDR created "The New Deal". This put a lot of people back to work but did not solve the problem.  Reports of the Holocaust started in 1933 and ended when the US and allies liberated the camps in 1945. Sadly, the Nazi's had support in the United States as well.

A crowd of approximately 20,000 attended a German American Bund Rally at New York's Madison Square Garden on February 20, 1939. At the center is a large portrait of George Washington, claimed as an icon by the Bund, who called him "the first Fascist", claiming Washington "knew democracy could not work." ([Atlantic) (Links to an external site.)](https://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2017/06/american-nazis-in-the-1930sthe-german-american-bund/529185/),

 While terrifying this was not the overwhelming sentiment of the United States and there was sympathy for The Jews, 6 million of whom died, and the other 5 million German people eventually killed in the Holocaust the US did not get involved until December 7th, 1941 when Pearl Harbor was attacked.

**Zoot Suit Riots** The Zoot Suit Riots were a series of violent clashes during which mobs of U.S. servicemen, off-duty police officers and civilians brawled with young Latinos and other minorities in Los Angeles. The June 1943 riots took their name from the baggy suits ( Detta - GORGEOUS SUITS)  worn by many minority ( DETTA -Many Latinx)  youths during that era, but the violence was more about racial tension than fashion. [(History Channel) (Links to an external site.)](https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/zoot-suit-riots)

Segregation While fighting a War against Racism.

Yep. The US segregated the troops.[From PBS.  (Links to an external site.)](https://www.pbs.org/wnet/african-americans-many-rivers-to-cross/history/what-was-black-americas-double-war/)

"The story of the campaign and its antecedents is quite fascinating. When the war broke out, the overwhelming number of black soldiers served in segregated units. Rather than tackle integration of the military head-on, civil rights leaders A. Philip Randolph, Walter White, and others organized a March on Washington to protest discrimination in the defense industry, which, well before Pearl Harbor, was receiving lucrative contracts from Uncle Sam to build up Britain’s and the nation’s defenses.

Eleanor Roosevelt met with Randolph and White to ask them to call the march off, but they refused; FDR then met with them, but they still refused — unless he signed an executive order banning discrimination in the defense industry. Facing a public relations disaster, FDR came around, and on June 25, 1941, he issued [Executive Order 8802 (Links to an external site.)](http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=72), creating the Fair Employment Practices Committee to enforce a new rule — that “there shall be no discrimination in the employment of workers in defense industries or government because of race, creed, color, or national origin.”

There are also some amazing stories of LGBTQ serving. If you are interested here is a [place to start.  (Links to an external site.)](https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/gay-and-lesbian-service-members#:~:text=The%201994%20documentary%2C%20Coming%20Out,written%20by%20historian%20Allan%20B%C3%A9rub%C3%A9.)

It would be another 25+ years until the civil rights movement took hold. And as we see by following the BLM movement we have a lot of work to do. Racism is still rampant and damages us all.

Leading up to when South Pacific was written the creators lived through the Korean War, 1953- DNA is discovered. 1954 segregation ruled illegal in Schools, Churchill was re-elected as Prime Minister in 1955,  Sputnik - the satellite - was launched by Russia in 1957

Week 5 Lecture 1.

Lecture 5

The Song.

How do book writers and lyricists decide where to put those songs? All those songs! Why sing?

A well-crafted musical has a character singing “when the tension rises so high – there is nowhere left to go but into a song. As the tension starts to diffuse, we come to the end of a song.” – David Spencer

Hopefully, the song is in the “voice” of that character. It sounds like words that would come out of their mouths. It speaks about them or their situation or their wants, needs, desires specifically. Hopefully, the song is a window into the characters’ life and / or feelings.

According to Arianna Rose “The songs do the heavy lifting”.

Let’s talk about rhymes.

There are songs that have perfect rhymes.  Webster’s Definition of perfect rhyme

1. in which different consonants are followed by an identical vowel and consonant sounds, such as in *moon and* *June*. Added: ( Or Noon, Spoon etc)

Near rhymes ( remember that from Sondheim?) – you hear these a lot in pop songs, but most Musical Theatre writers avoid them or use them sparingly

Webster’s Definition: rhyming in which the words sound the same but do not rhyme perfectly.

Words like motion / promotion or gage/ gain   worm” and “swarm  etc.

Some rules of the musical theatre songs (Some of this is long-held knowledge from my brain over the years. Resources may also be found at BMI, Stephen Sondheim’s books *Finishing The Hat, Look I Made a Hat,*David Spencer’s book *The Musical Theatre Writer’s Guide to Survival.* )

And remember, while these may feel like rules, Rules are meant to be broken – judiciously of course.

* There is also no need to have a scene full of dialogue and then put it into a song.
* A song heighten’s everything – be careful about swearing in the song for this reason.
  + Side note: *Sweeny Todd*and*If / Then*and many other musicals incorporate swearing…
* Controlled character’s – have perfect rhymes [Candy Store (Links to an external site.)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BQOoTX1Nxx8)[](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BQOoTX1Nxx8)from  “*Heathers*
* Characters that are out of control often have near rhymes or no rhymes at all.(YEP we  are looking  at  Waitress  Again..[“She Used to Be Mine” *Waitress* (Links to an external site.)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=53GIADHxVzM)[](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=53GIADHxVzM)

Still out of context but more "In character" ( And I know Alison so I think everyone should watch her work!!)

[Watch WAITRESS Star Alison Luff&#39;s Incredible Rendition of &quot;She Used to Be Mine&quot; (Links to an external site.)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3c7NUyhNuEs)[](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3c7NUyhNuEs)

Lastly: ( or now) Rhyming, when used, is the glue that holds the song together.

[From BMI (Links to an external site.)](https://www.bmi.com/theatre_workshop)

* my ideas represented
  + by this indented circle
* It must be singable
* It must be clear
* It must be about one thing and one thing only and not too wordy
  + ( Is Sondheim to wordy? Some would say yes others say no – he’s just right )
* It must be specific. Use details, adjectives, and verbs
* It must tell an interesting story
* It must not be someone feeling sorry for themselves (unless a comedy song)
  + Example: Adelaide’s Lament. Exception: She Used To Be Mine
* It must not mis-accent or be sing-songy ( iambic pentameter)
* It must use fresh ideas
  + Aka – no clichés or common platitudes “the road less traveled” “Do unto others” “Love is Blind” etc
* It must not false rhyme ( phone / Home is not a perfect rhyme) or transpose words ( it “was a world fantastic” rather than – it was a fantastic world –
  + the latter being the way we speak. This is a rule that you break VERY sparingly unless you’re in a fantasy musical like His Dark Materials
* It must be how the character would say these thoughts, in their way of speaking

Some rules from Sondheim – His Holy Trinity

1. Content ( function) dictates form
2. Less is more
3. God is in the details ( aka – be specific)

When you are in the business of writing musical theatre – you have to grab the audience fast. Many people do not hear the cast album before they see the show (his is obviously changing but still) you must grab the audience with lyrics, tune or both.

So you have a character who needs to sing. The tension is high and the song must come out. It is the voice of the character but still – what are some classic guidelines?

Types of Songs in Musicals ( yeah - you have seen this before but here is some new information! )

The I Want Song ( or I am song )   - My Shot – *Hamilton* ; Part of Your World – *The Little Mermaid*

The Conditional Love Song -  I’ll Know – *Guys and Dolls*

Comic List Song – La Vie Boheme – *Rent*

Plotless Act 2 Opener! – One By One – *The Lion King*

11 O’Clock Number – My favorites – Rose’s Turn from *Gypsy*She Used To Be Mine – *Waitress*

A parting question and some awareness moving forward.

If you had to write a song for one of your favorite characters that you know from a book, a TV show or movie that is NOT a musical who would it be? What “type” Would it be?

As you listen to the clips over the next couple weeks and read about where they are in the show, see if you can start to identify what type of song you are hearing.

# A little Fun Home History from a Prodcution

I will be expanding on this lesson in my own words next module but - a "Fun" bit of history from

The Musical Stage Company in Canada. I have bolded some things. You might want to take note.

History of Fun Home ALISON BECHDEL AND FUN HOME, THE GRAPHIC NOVEL

Alison Bechdel is a **cartoonist and graphic** memoirist known for exploring the complexities of familial relationships in multilayered works. Her novels use word and image to weave sophisticated narratives. Bechdel created the long running comic strip **Dykes to Watch Out For** (1983–2008).

This comic realistically captured the lives of women in the lesbian community through important cultural and political events of the day. The comic strip amassed a devoted and diverse following and became a precursor to Bechdel’s book-length graphic memoirs.

In 1981, Alison Bechdel graduated with a B.A. from Oberlin College. She is the editor of Best American Comics (2011), and her comic strip work has been collected in numerous volumes, including The Essential Dykes to Watch Out For (2008). Her work has also appeared in such publications as Slate, the New York Times Book Review, McSweeney’s, Granta, and The New Yorker. Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic is Bechdel’s 2006 graphic novel and her first extended work.

It is “a fresh and brilliantly told memoir from a cult favorite comic artist, marked by gothic twists, a family funeral home, sexual angst, and great books.” The work received massive acclaim upon its release and was recognized for pushing the forms of both graphic novels and memoirs. **Created from memory and referring to the detailed journals Bechdel kept since age 10,** the work is praised for its detailed account and accurate illustrations.

**The Bechdel Test:** Bechdel popularized a measurement of gender equality applied to film and other media in her comic strip Dykes to Watch Out For. While originally intended as a joke, the test has since been popularized. Today this test is called ‘The Bechdel Test’. The Bechdel Test measures gender equality in works of fiction based on three requirements: 1) does the work have at least two women in it, who 2) talk to each other, about 3) something other than a man.

ABOUT THE MUSICAL AND ITS CREATORS

Musical History: **In 2009,** Lisa Kron (book & lyrics) and Jeanine Tesori (score) began adapting Alison Bechdel’s graphic memoir into a musical. The musical was originally workshopped at the Ojai Playwrights Conference in 2009 followed by further development at the Sundance Theatre Lab. In 2012, the musical was further developed by the **Public Theater’s Public Lab** in New York City. The first full production opened Off-Broadway in September 2013 at the Public Theater.

**Considered “the first mainstream musical about a young lesbian,**” the production required multiple extensions to meet high ticket demands and earned a place as finalist for the 2014 Pulitzer Prize for Drama. It was recognized with numerous accolades including the Lucille Lortel Award for Outstanding Musical, the New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award for Best Musical and the Obie Award for Musical Theater. Fun Home opened on Broadway in April 2015 at the Circle in the Square Theatre staged in the round. The Broadway production won five Tony Awards in 2015 including Best Musical.

Women on Broadway Fun Home was an undeniable hit on Broadway in the 2015-2016 season, winning the Tony Award for Best Musical and Best Score in 2015. **This was the first time an all-female writing team won either honor**. Additionally, **Fun Home is the first musical to feature a lesbian protagonist**. Overall, this show was a milestone for representation on Broadway, both on and off the stage.

# Lecture 1 Mod 5: Lin Manuel Miranda +

Lin Manuel Miranda

Let us talk about Mr. Miranda. Most people know him or really started to appreciate him, after Hamilton. But Lin is so much more than that show.

He was born in 1980 in New York City. He speaks fondly of his Puerto Rican heritage, Puerto Rico is an American held island, some would say state, that currently does not have senate representation but they do pay taxes. Remember the entire revolution in 1776 was based on “Taxation without Representation”. They are considered part of America, different than other places where the US holds land but does not claim it as part of the US. This becomes important for Miranda as he gets older and Hurricane Maria damages Puetro Rico leaving them without power, water – or US assistance.

Even before this, before Hamilton, Miranda’s work had a political flavor. He started work on In The Heights in 2002. Not since West Side Story had there been a popular Broadway musical that was centered around an American Latinx story. He was breaking the mold again. Creating new paths and opportunities for those in the margins of American Society. He wrote this first draft of this show while he was still a student. A sophomore in College. ITH went on to be nominated for 13 Tony awards. They won four of them,

Best Musical

Best Orchestration

Best Choreography

Best Original Score

Watch Lin’s acceptance speech – seemingly rapping off the cuff – which is known for by the way. The beginning includes another Tony winner we have talked about in previous lectures. The actual speech is joyful, grateful, and pure Lin.

Miranda went on to work on Bring It On the Musical that did not fair as well. He worked on some Sondheim, wrote for Disney, for Sesame Street, He has made guest appearances as an actor on several shows.

In 2008 he was on vacation and read a Biography of Alexander Hamilton by Ron Chernow. He was inspired – he wrote a new musical that premiered in January 2015. I want to point this out.

6.5 years. He worked on this show for 6.5 years before it premiered at the Public Theatre in NY. That is how long and sometimes longer it takes to get a show up on Broadway. It is such a long process. Writing, getting actors together to sing through and read through the early drafts. Usually in a public forum even if it is only invited, guests. Then the writers head back to incorporate some feedback, dismiss other feedback. This process also lets them step back and watch and hear their words. Hopefully, they can do this objectively and see where the show isn’t working or if they have 5 “I want songs” but no 11’O clock numbers. Plot-wise maybe they went from A to C and didn’t realize they missed B. It was in their head, but they didn’t share that with the audience.

Lots of people are involved in creating a show. Especially a musical. Lin had resources, a name, producers with money for Hamilton. Even that was a process because so many musicals or shows never move past someone’s living room because it is a huge risk to produce. There is an entire show about this called

Exploring the entire idea that you can make more money with a flop than a success – but only if you are VERY dishonest. Many Broadway shows run in the Red (losing money). It is one of the reasons Broadway is always on the brink of shutting down, why Disney gives it a lift usually, Sadly Frozen is already closing due to the Pandemic. They were expected to come back when the Theatre re-opened but the announced that will not be happening.

Because of Bring it On it was more challenging than Miranda wanted it to be to find producers. Thank goodness he did.  were a huge part of their success.

Big surprise – He is an activist. Are you noticing a theme here? So many of our artists and creators are activists. They know what its like to struggle. To have nothing. They see talented people who do not get the same opportunities they have been given. They realize that part of their success was pure luck. Meeting the right people at the right time. Finding someone who believed in a project when no one else did – but that person had a checkbook. Many of them are also humanitarians. It is hard to be in the theatre and not meet a wide range of human beings. Gay, Straight, Christian, Pagan, Poor, Rich, college-educated, barely made it through High School. So many different types of people come together in the theatre to work together and create stories. Share stories and try to change the world. Make it a little better. So of course this naturally leads to philanthropy or volunteering ( if they don’t have a lot of money).

Miranda is also very active on Social Media so you see the causes he is raising money for in your feed often when you follow him. Coupled with huge doses of entertainment.

As you have or will read in your book – he is also the person who coined: Love is love is love is love. That was also in an