
Music/TAPS 186F – Broadway Songbook

Stanford University – **Spring 2022**

Instructor: Tom Grey tsgrey@stanford.edu

Meeting times: Tuesday/Thursday 9:45 - 11:15am

Classroom: 102 Braun Music Center



Course Description

Musical theater show tunes have found their way into the basic fabric of American cultural consciousness for nearly a century. In the early years of “Tin Pan Alley” up through the 1920s and ‘30s there was little distinction between the hit numbers of Broadway musical comedy and American “popular song” in general (all sharing an important affinity with blues and early jazz). With the eventual dominance of competing popular music genres (R&B, rock, soul, and the vast spectrum of “pop” since the 1940s-60s), musical theater songs became a more specialized niche, featuring a more distinctive relation between lyrics, music, character, story, singer, and audience. Their place in popular culture at large has shifted, but the dialogue with all aspects of the culture, including social and political identities, remains as dynamic as ever.

Taking its cue from Rob Kapilow’s recent *Listening for America: Inside the Great American Songbook* (2019), this course focuses on a selection of classic – but also some more recent – musical theater songs, through close readings of their music, lyrics, contexts, audience reception, and performance histories. (We might also consider the role of the arranger, from Robert Russell Bennett in the “Golden Age” to Sondheim’s Jonathan Tunick and Miranda’s Alex Lacamoire.) Kapilow’s book will serve as a starting point, although we will vary and extend his core repertoire of sixteen songs from the Broadway “Golden Age” through Sondheim to include other classics and more songs from the past two decades (songwriters such as Stephen Schwartz, Howard Ashman and Alan Menken, William Finn, Jeanine Tesori, Jason Robert Brown, Lynn Ahrens and Steven Flaherty, Benj Pasek and Justin Paul, and Lin-Manuel Miranda). Each week we will study several songs as representatives of important forms, styles, genres, and cultural phenomena. During the quarter students will choose two songs (one classic, one more contemporary) to work on from various angles reflecting the approaches tried out in class. In weeks 9 and 10 students will present the results of their individual song study in the form of lecture-recital or illustrated slide presentation.



Objectives / Learning Outcomes

By studying the anatomy of great Broadway show tunes from multiple perspectives – melodic and harmonic design, sense and structure of lyrics, different instrumental and vocal arrangements, classic and contemporary performances – students acquire an appreciation of what makes these songs work, on and off stage, and what makes them endure. This “anatomical” study of a select repertoire of show tunes enables students to work with them creatively in a variety of ways: to develop their own performances as genuine “interpretations”; to develop a critical appreciation of recorded interpretations; to write new lyrics and music in various Broadway styles and genres; to adapt songs for new purposes; and to explain the meaning and value of songs (to themselves and to audiences). We should also come away with a deeper understanding of the Broadway musical’s impact on American musical culture, and the culture at large, over the past century.

Course Outline

Week 1: 29-31 March. **What becomes a classic?** “Somewhere Over the Rainbow,” “The Surrey with the Fringe on Top,” “My Favorite Things,” “Tonight” (Duet and Quintet versions)

Week 2: 5-7 April. **Verse and chorus:** the 32-bar refrain, origins and legacy. Music and Lyrics: Bernstein and Sondheim (more *West Side Story*)

Week 3: 12-14 April. **Lyrics:** Ira Gershwin, Cole Porter, Irving Berlin, Stephen Sondheim

– Song Projects: phase 1 (initial selection of titles, performances, readings)

Week 4: 119-21 April. **Who am I?:** the “establishing song” (*Cinderella, Les Misérables, Hamilton, Dear Evan Hansen*)

Week 5: 26-28 April. **Remaking the song:** show tunes as “jazz standards” (George Gershwin, Cole Porter, Richard Rodgers, Harold Arlen, et al.)

Week 6: 3-5 May. **Context:** song placement, reprises, altered meanings (*Carousel, Gypsy, West Side Story, Wicked,*

– Song Projects: phase 2 (preliminary reports: analysis, interpretation)

Week 7: 10-12 May. **On my own:** ballads and torch songs (“The Man that Got Away,” “And I Am Telling You,” “Burn”)

Week 8: 17-19 May. **All together now:** anthems and ensemble numbers (“No Business Like Show Business,” “Brotherhood of Man,” “Do You Hear the People Sing?”/“One Day More,” “Seasons of Love”)

Week 9: 24-26 May. **Parodies:** the circulation of classics in contemporary media culture (e.g., *Simpsons* and *Family Guy*, SNL, James Corden, Randy Rainbow, et al.)

– Song Projects: phase 3 – in-class presentations (weeks 9-10)

Week 10: 31 May-2 June. **Show time:** performance, presentation, discussion of Song projects

Assignments – projects

The core assignment for each week is to look at /listen to closely 2-3 songs chosen to represent the thematic topic (style, genre or “song type,” form, technique, performing tradition, theatrical or cultural context, etc.). Readings from Rob Kapilow 2019 and other readings on songwriters, shows, performers will be posted in weekly Canvas modules, where students will also post replies to Discussion pages on aspects of each week’s repertoire. Additionally, students select at least two songs to work on throughout the quarter, culminating in an “annotated” performance or other form of lecture demonstration (weeks 9-10). Preliminary stages of these projects will be presented and discussed in Weeks 3 and 6.

Grading basis

Regular attendance and participation: 25%

Canvas Discussion page responses: 25%

Quarter-long song projects, including final performance / presentations: 50%



Reading and resources

- As mentioned (Course Description), a primary text for the course will be **Rob Kapilow**, *Listening for America: Inside the Great American Songbook from Gershwin to Sondheim* (New York: Liveright Publishing/W. W. Norton, 2019). Students are encouraged to purchase the text electronically (for access to online music examples)
- Piano-vocal scores of core repertoire distributed in class and in PDF form on Canvas.
- Lyrics for all or most repertoire can be found at: www.allmusicals.com
- Selections from “further reading” list (see below) will be available in Course Files on Canvas (or as links to S.U.L. electronic subscriptions); see weekly Canvas modules.
- In addition to performance materials on YouTube and Spotify (etc.), YouTube is an inexhaustible source for (sometimes!) interesting, valuable information and commentary, e.g. [Seth Rudetsky's Deconstructing Broadway](#)

Further reading

Carol DeGeire, *Defying Gravity: The Creative Career of Stephen Schwartz from Godspell to Wicked* (2nd ed., Milwaukee WI: Applause Theatre and Cinema Books, 2018)

Hugh Fordin, *Getting to Know Him: A Biography of Oscar Hammerstein II* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1977)

Philip Furia, *Ira Gershwin: The Art of the Lyricist* (Oxford University Press, 1995)

Allen Forte, *Listening to Classic American Popular Songs* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001)

Mark Eden Horowitz, *Sondheim on Music* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2019)

Edward Jablonski and Lawrence D. Stewart, intro. by Carl van Vechten, *The Gershwin Years* (Garden City NY: Doubleday, 1958)

Jeffrey Magee, *Irving Berlin's American Musical Theater* (Oxford University Press, 2012)

Lin-Manuel Miranda, with Jeremy McCarter, *Hamilton: The Revolution: Being the Complete Libretto of the Broadway Musical [...]* (New York: Melcher Media, 2016)

Don Randel, Matthew Shaftel, and Susan Forscher Weiss, eds., *A Cole Porter Companion* (University of Illinois Press, 2016)

Walter Rimler, *The Man That Got Away: The Life and Songs of Harold Arlen* (University of Illinois Press, 2015)

Ronald Schleifer, *Modernism and Popular Music: Language and Music in Gershwin, Porter, Waller, and Holiday* (Cambridge University Press, 2011)

Benjamin Sears, *The Irving Berlin Reader* (Oxford University Press, 2012)

Nate Sloan and Charlie Harding, *Switched-on Pop: How Popular Music Works and Why it Matters* (Oxford University Press, 2019)

Steven Suskin: *Show Tunes: The Songs, Shows, and Careers of Broadway's Major Composers* (4th edition), New York: Oxford University Press, 2010

Stephen Sondheim, *Finishing the Hat: Collected Lyrics 1954-1981* (New York: Kopf, 2010)
_____, *Look I Made a Hat: Collected Lyrics 1981-2011* (New York: Kopf, 2011)

Theodore Taylor, *Jule: The Story of Composer Jule Styne – A Revue in Many Acts and Scenes* (New York: Random House, 1978)

Jack Viertel, *The Secret Life of the American Musical: How Broadway Musicals Are Built* (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 2016)

Ben Yagoda, *The B side: The Death of Tin Pan Alley and the Rebirth of the Great American Song* (Penguin Books, 2015)