
Music 34N

Performing America: The Broadway Musical back in the classroom: Spring 2022

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Location: Braun Music Center, Room 105

Meeting schedule: Tuesday/Thursday 3:15 – 4:45pm



After an unprecedented year and a half without live theater, musicals are making their way back to the stage on Broadway, around the country and the world. How the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the landscape of Broadway musical theater remains to be seen.

Meanwhile, the past year has seen a surge of film adaptations of new and classic musicals, as well as the continuing prominence of Disney animated musicals.

This quarter, in addition looking at examples from across the history of the American musical, we'll consider how different platforms – live, virtual, cinematic – affect the way we experience the art form today.



Course Description

Musical theater developed across the twentieth century as one of America's most distinctive cultural products, always in dialogue with American culture at large. At the beginning, the popular musical theater centered in lower Manhattan, around Broadway and Times Square, together with the nearby music publishing business ("Tin Pan Alley"), merged the influences of European operetta, African-American ragtime and jazz, the marches of John Philip Sousa, Anglo-Irish folk ballads, and the musical voices of immigrant communities of all kinds. This seminar looks at how the themes, characters, stories, and songs of the Broadway musical reflect ideas of American identity over the last hundred years. Intersections with jazz from the 1920s on, with the movies from the 1930s on, with rock and pop music from the late 1960s on, and with hip-hop and developments in sound engineering since the 2000s are all key sonic elements of this story. Issues of race, class, gender roles, sexual identity, and performativity all play a central role in the themes and content of musical theater.

Early "musical comedy" reflected social and class issues more indirectly, as a by-product of the popular musical styles it put on stage, including the new music of African-Americans. During and after World War II the team of Rodgers and Hammerstein promoted a new kind of thematically integrated "musical play" that engaged with contemporary social issues of the day, while still providing a series of popular tunes and dance sequences expected by Broadway audiences. Since the advent of rock and pop idioms on Broadway after the late 1960s and the "concept" driven shows of Sondheim and others since the 1970s and '80s, Broadway shows continue to expand the range of subjects and musical styles. In the 21st century films have become the most common source material, while "Jukebox" musicals like *Jersey Boys*, *Mamma Mia*, *Beautiful*, or *Tina: The Tina Turner Musical* use classic rock, soul, R&B, and other pop repertoire to tell stories. For a century now, Broadway musicals have provided a mirror of social values, politics, and changing musical voices in America and around the world.

This course looks some basic song types and structures that define the "show tune" across different eras; the diverse musical-cultural ingredients of Broadway music from the early 1900s to the present; the dynamics of live theater vs. the "movie musical" or filmed versions of stage shows; the impact of Disney animated musicals and their stage transfers; interactions of American and European musical theater since the 1980s "mega-musicals" (*Phantom*, *Les Miz*, *Miss Saigon*), musicals in contemporary media (*Glee*, *Smash*, *Idol*, *The Voice*, *Zoë's Extraordinary Playlist*, YouTube and TikTok); and how songs from shows continue to circulate in the entertainment and media mainstream.



Course Objectives

Above all we will think about the ways music, lyrics, story, choreography, and staging work together to make a successful “show” – how these ingredients were developed in the original production, and how they have been re-conceived for films or revivals. How has musical theater “constructed” personal and community identities over the last century, how does it project values, negotiate social conflicts? What is the relationship between commercial success and artistic value? In order to understand the workings of Broadway musical theater we analyze musical formulas used by some of the best songwriters of different periods (especially the idea of traditional “song types”); elements of effective lyrics; the role of the “book” or spoken dialogue; and the contributions of choreographers, directors, producers, music arrangers/directors, and tech crew.

We’ll take advantage of the return to live instruction this year to encourage some live performance, sing-along, etc. in class and in presentations, as well as incorporating some of the virtual presentation skills (podcasts, blogposts, videos, etc.) you may have had a chance to develop over the past two years.

Keep an eye on the **weekly Modules in Canvas** for information, readings, audio/video examples, study pages and Discussion pages, Quizzes and other assignments.

Reading materials

There is no assigned textbook for the course. Some suggested readings will be posted in Canvas weekly Modules. Discussion pages (**with assigned responses**) will reference relevant readings and performances.

Selections from these texts will be available on Canvas (“Files”):

American Musical Theater by James Leve (Oxford University Press, 2016)

[*Cambridge Companion to the Musical*](#) ed. William Everett and Paul Laird
(Cambridge University Press, 2nd edition 2008; 3rd ed. 2017)

[*Changed for Good: A Feminist History of the Broadway Musical*](#) by Stacy Wolf
(Oxford University Press, 2011)

Experiencing Broadway Music: A Listener’s Companion by Kat Sherrell (Rowman & Littlefield, 2016)

- *Cambridge Companion* and *Changed for Good* also online through Stanford Libraries
- listening and viewing material will be mainly on YouTube and Spotify.
- Selected sheet music for individual songs will be provided.

Assignments

– There will be a series of **Discussion pages** with prompts and designated deadlines for entering responses. In some cases you will be given a choice of discussion prompts to respond to. These will be ungraded; pay attention to posted response requirements.

– There will be **three Quizzes** identifying song repertoire and commenting on features discussed in class. These may be given either in class or online – topics and repertoire will be announced a week before.

– Instead of exams, there will be a **mid-term and final small-group Project** for presentation and discussion in class. See syllabus and stay tuned to Canvas announcements about these.

Course Outline

Week 1 (29, 31 March) – “The Musical” – what, why, how?

- Introductions
- What are “musicals”? – Three ages of the Broadway Musical
- *Oklahoma!* (1943), the integrated book musical in the “Golden Age”
- The traditional Verse-Chorus song structure

Week 2 (5, 7 April) – Starting the show

- Opening numbers: Where, when, and who are we?
- The establishing song: I am / I want
- Verse-Chorus structure, continued
- **Discussion page:** “I want” or “I am” songs

Week 3 (12, 14 April) – The shape of a show

- How do songs or other musical numbers “advance the plot” (and what else?)
- Act 1 vs. Act 2 (strategies from *Oklahoma!* to *Wicked*, *Hamilton*, *Evan Hansen*)
- *Little Shop of Horrors* vs. *Sweeney Todd*: comedy vs drama in musical theater
- **Quiz no. 1:** Verse-chorus form, opening numbers and establishing songs

Group projects (weeks 3-5): choose a topic and a format (slide presentation, podcast, video, or live performance)

Week 4 (19, 21 April) – Musical and cultural origins of the American musical

- Operetta, minstrelsy, ragtime-blues-jazz, the vaudeville tradition
- *Showboat* (1927) – two concepts of “integration”
- Ragtime and *Ragtime* (1998)
- Jazz and the vaudeville idea in *Chicago* (1977)
- **Discussion page:** race relations in the early Broadway musical and its music

Week 5 (26, 28 April) – Musical comedy since the “1st age”

- Musicals as an antidote to depression (and Depression)
- First Age musical comedy: *Anything Goes*, *Girl Crazy/Crazy for You*
- Third Age musical comedy: *Legally Blonde*, *Book of Mormon*, *The SpongeBob Musical*
- **GROUP PROJECT NO. 1 PRESENTATIONS**

Week 6 (3, 5 May) – Broadway song types since the “Golden Age”

- The List Song
 - Ballads and Torch Songs
 - I am / I want (again)
 - Dance types
 - The Anthem, the 11 o’clock number, ... and others
- **Quiz no. 2:** Song types

Week 7 (10, 12 May) – Stage and Screen

- Musical theater vs. film musicals: *Cabaret* on stage and screen
 - Filming a musical (*In the Heights*, *West Side Story*, *Dear Evan Hansen*)
 - Movie to stage and back: *Beauty and the Beast* and beyond (Disney musicals)
- **Group project no. 2:** choose a topic (Jukebox musicals, Disney musicals, adapting a film) and a format

Week 8 (17, 19 May) – Big and Small: the “Mega-musical” vs. Off-Broadway and the “Concept” musical

- *A Chorus Line* – the dance musical as “concept”
 - The mega-musical as European import and commercial investment:
 - “Concept” musicals off and on Broadway (from Sondheim to *A Strange Loop*)
- **Discussion page:** the “mega-musical” legacy in *Wicked* and *Hamilton*?

Week 9 (24, 26 May) – Jukebox musicals and film-based musicals in the 21st century

- *Mamma Mia!* and her offspring
- Film to stage: *Tootsie*, for example

Week 10: (31 May, 2 June) –

GROUP PROJECT NO. 2 PRESENTATIONS

- **Quiz no. 3:** song types, repertoire, contemporary Broadway genres

NOTE: Quizzes nos.1 and 2 will be given in class; the final Quiz (no. 3) will be on Canvas.

Local productions

Ram's Head Theatrical Society will return to its annual (live) spring musical production in Memorial Auditorium this year with *Little Shop of Horrors*. Everyone is encouraged to attend (if you are not already involved in some capacity). We'll work this show into topics and class projects during weeks 3-5 of the quarter.

The timing of local professional productions does not align too well with our spring quarter schedule (starting 8 June the touring production of *Hadestown* plays at the Orpheum in San Francisco, followed by *Moulin Rouge* in September; Dear Evan Hansen plays at Broadway San Jose also starting 8 June). *Rent* and *Tootsie* are playing at Broadway San Jose in April: we might arrange an optional field trip to the latter, playing 19-24 April

Readings

Suggested readings and other materials relating to **Discussion pages** will be posted to weekly **Modules** in Canvas.

Grading

As a freshman-preference Stanford Introductory Seminar, Music 34N is oriented towards enrichment, social-cultural engagement, and the acquisition/improvement of some basic musical, presentational, and writing skills.

Final grades are based on

- (1) Regular presence in class meetings: 25%
- (2) Discussion page responses: 25%
- (3) Quizzes: 25%
- (4) Group project participation: 25%