

American Musical Theatre: A Subject Guide

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Scope

Resources identified in this guide to be used by an undergraduate student taking an introductory course in American Musical Theatre at an academic institution that is part of the Triangle Research Library Network. Studying musical theatre in general as well as its history in the United States, the particular culture of Broadway and off-Broadway productions, and the evolution of productions from stage to screen and back, as well as the popularization of the genre is relevant to the understanding and appreciation of the subject. Therefore, general reference works covering theatre as well as specialized resources devoted to music, lyrics, composers, history, Broadway, etc. are relevant when taken in context with resources particular to American Musical Theatre. An undergraduate student in at one of the academic institutions within the Triangle Research Library Network can find all included resources online, at their university's library, at an academic library within reasonable distance, or via inter-library loan from another library. Resources were found via searches conducted on Worldcat.org, the Triangle Research Libraries Network, databases available from academic libraries in TRLN, and various online searches.

Introduction

Broadway has changed tremendously from the early days when the shows were referred to as musical comedies. Musical Theater is now a more expanded art form.

Back then, singer/actors were not the norm. From the 60's to now, it is necessary to do it all to be a consummate Broadway performer. ~ Betty Buckley

Musical theatre combines song, spoken lines, acting, and dance. Performers in musical theatre productions are referred to as “triple-threats” because they must be able to sing, dance and act. With the recent popularity of television shows such as *GLEE* and *Smash*, students are participating in and studying theatre, particularly, musical theatre in greater numbers. American musical theatre is now more greatly influencing popular culture than it ever has in the past. Students studying musical theatre need to be familiar with its evolution and major trends so they may fully appreciate the current form of modern musicals and their influence on our society.

The Black Crook, which premiered in New York on September 12, 1866, is considered the first American musical theatre piece that conformed to the modern conception musical theatre (adding dance and original musical to spoken dialogue to help tell a story). Beginning in the 20th century, musical plays that combined song, dance, acting, and spoken lines became more commonly known as “musicals”. Since the 20th century, the term “book musical” has been used to describe a musical play that integrates song and dance into a story with a goal of evoking emotions other than laughter. Music, lyric, and the book or script are the three key components of a book musical. The book or script is composed of spoken dialogue and stage directions while the libretto (Italian for “little book”) of a musical is the combined dialogue and lyrics.

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From the comic opera and operetta of the early 1900's to the popular Ziegfield follies of the 1920's, from the Golden Age musicals of the 1950's to the rock musical of the 1970's and even up to today's mega-musicals, pop-operas and jukebox musicals, American musical theatre has evolved greatly over the past hundred years. The musical revues of the Roaring Twenties included sketches and song that had little or no connecting plot. Premiering on December 27, 1927 at the Ziegfield Theatre in New York, *Show Boat* was a large leap forward past this style of entertainment. It is recognized as the first true "book musical" with full integration of song, dance, and story to create a full-bodied work of art. George and Ira Gerswhin also staged a number of works during this time including *Lady, Be Good!*, and *Funny Face*.

The 1930's saw creative teams trying to build on *Show Boat*'s success and innovations. The Gershwin Brothers had continued acclaim with the political satires *Strike Up the Band* and *Of Thee I Sing*. Yet, it was the combined talents of Rodgers and Hammerstein in the 1930's and 1940's who fully embraced the revolution begun by *Show Boat*. In 1943, their show *Oklahoma!* became another major turning point in the direction of American musical theatre. While it stayed true to many traditions of the operetta, its departure form such made it an extremely influential musical. Other following Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals followed in the same vein including *Carousel*, *South Pacific*, *The King and I*, *Flower Drum Song*, and *The Sound of Music*.

The 1940's and 1950's is referred to as the Golden Age of Musicals. While Rogers and Hammerstein shows were still quite popular, formulaic musical comedies such as *Annie Get Your Gun*, *Guys and Dolls*, *Damn Yankees*, and *West Side Story* also proved quite successful. In fact, 1956's *My Fair Lady* started a trend toward period operettas. In the late 50's and early 60's musical comedy creators tried to vary the formula by introducing new settings and subjects in

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shows like *Gypsy*, *How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying*, *Cabaret*, and *Hello, Dolly!* Yet, it was also during this time that *The Threepenny Opera* became the longest running off-Broadway musical until *The Fantasticks* proving that small-scale off-Broadway musicals could also be profitable.

In the 1960's and 1970's the musical began to incorporate newer music genres such as rock and roll in shows like *Hair*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Godspell*, and *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. Off-Broadway and Off-Off Broadway productions including *Peace*, *Promenade*, *The Fantasticks*, and *Dames at Sea* proved renewed the concept that musicals did not require elaborate staging. Yet, the early 1970's musical theatre also began suffering because of a failure to develop new artist and audiences. One significant exception to this was composer-lyricist Stephen Sondheim who began to contribute significantly to American musical theatre with controversial shows like *Company*, *A Little Night Music*, and *Sweeny Todd*. Another significant trend of the 1970's is the emergence of a strong African-American influence seen in shows like *Raisin*, *Dreamgirls*, *Purlie*, and *The Wiz*.

The 1980's saw Broadway largely influenced by European mega-musicals due to a dearth of American musicals. *Les Miserables*, *Miss Saigon*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, and *Cats* epitomize this trend of large budgets, casts, sets, and effects combined with a pop-influenced music and lyrics.

A new generation of theatrical composers emerge during the 1990's producing Off-Broadway, lower-budget, smaller-scale shows such as *Rent*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Bat Boy: The Musical*, and *Blood Brothers*. Yet, an almost opposing trend of corporate backed shows including *Beauty and the Beast*, *The Lion King*, and *Aida* also begin Broadway runs. In 1996,

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the live-action musical version of *Evita* becomes the first successful musical movie in nearly two decades.

In the last 15 years, many theatres are finding success with typical bill of fare revivals while others are taking chances on new and unusual (though typically modest-budget) shows like *Urinetown*, *Avenue Q*, *Spring Awakening*, and *American Idiot*. Other trends include corporate sponsored large budget productions like *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, a return to the mega-musical spectacles of the 80's, and the staging of jukebox musicals centered around a collection of already popular songs (Examples: *Movin' Out*, *Jersey Boys*, and *Rock of Ages*).

A resurgence of interest in musical theatre can be seen in the rise of stage to screen productions beginning with *Evita* in 1996 and continuing with live-action musical movies like *Moulin Rouge!*, *Chicago*, *Phantom of the Opera*, *Dreamgirls*, *Hairspray*, *Sweeny Todd*, and *Burlesque*. Additionally, made for TV musicals adapted from the stage including *South Pacific*, *The Music Man*, and *Once Upon a Mattress*, and several television shows featuring musical episodes (*Ally McBeal*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Scrubs*, and *That 70's Show*) demonstrate the influence of musical theatre on more entertainment genres than just the stage. Specifically, recent examples include the internet based musical *Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog*, reality shows with a musical theatre tie-in (*Any Dream Will Do*), and current shows such as the previously mentioned *GLEE* and *Smash*.

Resources

- Triangle Research Libraries Network
- Worldcat.org
- Google
- Databases available from libraries within TRLN

Keywords and Subject Headings

When conducting searches, one should consider using a combination of keywords. For example, “Musical AND Theater” and “Broadway AND Musical” produced more relevant results. Also, one should try both the British and American spellings of theater (theatre vs. theater) and musical specific terminology such as “libretto”. The addition of the term “American”, “Broadway, or “Off-Broadway” helped to focus results to those more relevant to the subject of American Musical Theater.

Suggested Keywords

- Music Theatre
- Music Theater
- Musical Theatre
- Musical Theater
- Musicals
- Broadway
- Off-Broadway
- Libretto
- American Musical Theatre
- American Musical Theater

Library of Congress Subject Headings

- Musical theater.
- Musical theater producers and director.
- Musical theater--Production and direction.
- Musical theater--United States--History.
- Musicals.
- Musical--Discography.
- Musical--Libretto.
- Musicals--History and criticism.
- Musicals--Scores.
- Musicals--United States--History and criticism.
- Musicals--History and criticism--United States.
- Broadway (New York, NY)--History--20th Century

Bibliography

Books

General Reference Works

Bordman, G. M., & Norton, R. (2011). *American musical theatre: A chronicle*. Oxford: Oxford

Traces the musical from its origins through the 1989-90 season addressing history, criticism, and theatrical lore. This second edition revises and updates the first.

Bunnett, R., Kennedy, M. P., & Muir, J. (2001). *Collins guide to musicals*. Glasgow:

HarperCollins.

Provides entries on nearly 200 musicals including information about composers and lyricists; first performances; principal characters and plot lines; best-known songs; initial critical reaction; and additional recommended recording. The guide should answer any query about musicals from "Oklahoma" to "Cabaret".

Everett, W. A. (2004). *The musical: A research and information guide*. New York: Routledge.

Is the first large-scale annotated bibliography of this subject and covers the 'Broadway' musical as well as the film musical and musical styles around the world.

Everett, W. A., & Laird, P. R. (2008). *Historical dictionary of the Broadway musical*. Lanham,

Md: Scarecrow Press.

Includes a chronology of Broadway musicals from 1866 to 2006, an introduction describing their evolution, and a dictionary of nearly 1,000 entries arranged alphabetically by person, show title, or subject.

AMERICAN MUSICAL THEATRE: A SUBJECT GUIDE

Gänzl, K. (1994). *The encyclopedia of the musical theatre*. New York: Schirmer Books.

Three-volume reference work recommended for starting research projects on all aspects of musical theater. Contains substantive entries under the titles of individual shows, as well as librettists, lyricists, and composers.

Hischak, T. S. (2011). *Off-Broadway musicals since 1919: From Greenwich Village follies to The toxic avenger*. Lanham, Md: Scarecrow Press.

Covers 375 Off-Broadway productions, from the early 20th century through 2010. Musicals are described, discussed, and analyzed with particular attention given to their books, scores, performers, and creators.

Hischak, T. S. (1993). *Stage it with music: An encyclopedic guide to the American musical theatre*. Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press.

Includes entries on over 300 individual shows, musical series, performers, composers, lyricists, librettists, directors, designers, music directors, orchestrators, choreographers, producers, producing companies and other theatrical institutions, and on other subjects and genres relating to musical theatre.

Hischak, T. S., & Oxford University Press. (2008). *The Oxford companion to the American musical*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dictionary of short entries on American musicals and their practitioners, including performers, composers, lyricists, producers, and choreographers.

Larkin, C., & Martland, J. (1999). *The Virgin encyclopedia of stage and film musicals*. London: Virgin in association with Muze UK Ltd.

A guide to the greatest shows and films in the history of the musical, as well as their

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stars, lyricists and composers. Over 1600 entries provide facts, figures and critical opinion on all aspects of the field.

Norton, R. C. (2002). *A chronology of American musical theater*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Season-by-season chronology of every musical comedy, operetta, comic opera, burlesque, and revue performed on a major New York City stage from 1851 through May 2001. Entries for more than 3,000 plays including full cast, crew, production staff, venues, number of performances, creative personnel, and songs. Three indexes cover song titles, show names, and names of principal players and famous chorus members.

Stewart, J. (2006). *Broadway musicals, 1943-2004*. Jefferson, N.C: McFarland.

Provides information on every musical produced on Broadway since Oklahoma in 1943. Each entry contains a brief synopsis; the pre-Broadway story; the facts of the Broadway run itself, with dates, theatres, and cast and crew; and post-Broadway information with a detailed list of later notable productions, along with important reviews and awards.

Books focused on American Musical Theatre

Block, G. H. (1997). *Enchanted evenings: The Broadway musical from Show boat to Sondheim*.

New York: Oxford University Press.

Brantley, B. (2012). *The New York times book of Broadway musicals*. New York: Abrams.

Coleman, B. E., & Sebesta, J. (2008). *Women in American musical theatre: Essays on composers, lyricists, librettists, arrangers, choreographers, designers, directors, producers and performance artists*. Jefferson, N.C: McFarland.

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Kenrick, J. (2008). *Musical theatre: A history*. New York: Continuum.

Keyser, H. H. (2009). *Geniuses of the American musical theatre: The composers and lyricists*.

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Naden, C. J. (2011). *The Golden Age of American Musical Theatre: 1943-1965*. Scarecrow Press.

Norton, R. C. (2002). *A chronology of American musical theater*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Patinkin, S. (2008). *"No legs, no jokes, no chance": A history of the American musical theater*. Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press.

Stempel, L. (2010). *Showtime: A history of the Broadway musical theater*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co.

Suskin, S. (2002). *Broadway Yearbook*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Suskin, S. (1990). *Opening night on Broadway: A critical quotebook of the golden era of the musical theatre, Oklahoma! (1943) to Fiddler on the roof (1964)*. New York: Schirmer Books.

Suskin, S. (1997). *More opening nights on Broadway: A critical quotebook of the musical theatre, 1965 through 1981*. New York: Schirmer Books.

Wright, A. (2012). *West End Broadway: The golden age of the American musical in London*. Woodbridge: Boydell Press.

Databases

All database descriptions are from Worldcat.org.

Academic Search Complete

A scholarly, multidisciplinary database providing indexing and abstracts for over 10,000 publications, including monographs, reports, conference proceedings, and others. Also includes full-text access to over 5,000 journals. Offers coverage of many areas of academic study including: archaeology, area studies, astronomy, biology, chemistry, civil engineering, electrical engineering, ethnic & multicultural studies, food science & technology, general science, geography, geology, law, mathematics, mechanical engineering, music, physics, psychology, religion & theology, women's studies, and other fields.

Arts and Humanities Citation Index

A multidisciplinary database covering the journal literature of the arts and humanities, with cited references but not abstracts. Indexes 1,100 of the world's leading arts and humanities journals, plus individually selected, relevant items from over 6,800 major science and social science journals.

Humanities Full Text

Humanities Full Text includes many of the most important academic journals in the humanities with the full text of articles from over 300 periodicals dating back to 1995, and high-quality indexing for almost 700 journals--of which 470 are peer-reviewed--dating as far back as 1984. The database provides coverage of feature articles, interviews, bibliographies, obituaries, and original works of fiction, drama, poetry and book reviews,

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as well as reviews of ballets, dance programs, motion pictures, musicals, radio and television programs, plays, operas, and more.

Humanities International Complete

Humanities International Complete provides full text of hundreds of journals, books and other published sources from around the world. Includes all data from Humanities International Index (over 2,000 titles and 2 million records) and full text for more than 670 journals.

International Bibliography of Theatre and Dance

Database is an index to journal articles, books, book articles and dissertation abstracts on all aspects of theatre and performance. It is a multicultural and inter-disciplinary research tool for theater students, educators and professionals. IBTD was initiated by the American Society for Theatre Research. Since 1984, the Theatre Research Data Center (TRDC) at Brooklyn College has published 14 volumes of the IBTD.

International Index to the Performing Arts Full Text

IIPA full text draws its content from more than 210 scholarly and popular performing arts periodicals, and also indexes a variety of documents such as biographical profiles, conference papers, obituaries, interviews, discographies, reviews and events. The database covers a broad spectrum of the arts and entertainment industry, including dance, film, television, drama, theater, stagecraft, musical theater, broadcast arts, circus performance, comedy, storytelling, opera, pantomime, puppetry, and magic. Every IIPA full text record in the current file (1998 forward) contains an abstract.

JSTOR

Provides page images of back issues of the core scholarly journals in the humanities, social sciences, and basic sciences from the earliest issues to within a few years of current publication. Users may browse by journal title or discipline, or may search the full-text or citations/abstracts. New issues of existing titles and new titles are added approximately on a weekly basis.

MLA International Bibliography

Indexes critical materials on literature, languages, linguistics, and folklore. Provides access to citations from worldwide publications, including periodicals, books, essay collections, working papers, proceedings, dissertations and bibliographies.

Music Index Online

Music Index is a comprehensive guide to music periodicals and literature from 1952 to present. Formerly The Music Index Online provided by Harmonie Park Press, this database contains cover-to-cover indexing and abstracts of articles about music, musicians, and the music industry for more than 475 periodicals, as well as book reviews, obituaries, news, and selective coverage for more than 230 periodicals.

Oxford Music Online

Oxford Music Online (OMO) is the access-point for Oxford music reference subscriptions and products, including Grove Music Online, The Oxford Companion to Music, and The Oxford Dictionary of Music. With OMO patrons can cross-search Grove and Oxford reference content in one location. Articles from specialist dictionaries such as

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The New Grove Dictionary of Opera and The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz, 2nd ed., are available via OMO.

Project Muse

Contains full-text HTML and image files for the entire Project Muse database of electronic versions of Johns Hopkins University Press print titles, up to and including <1998>.

RILM Abstracts of Music Literature

Extensive collection of bibliographic records and abstracts focused on music reference and other music related fields. Offers international coverage of books, bibliographies, conference proceedings, catalogs, discographies, dissertations, ethnographic recordings, Festschriften, films, iconographies, and videos. Covers 1967 to present.

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Online Resources

Broadway League

<http://broadwayleague.com/>

Provides information on special Broadway events and programs, as well as industry information such as NYC Broadway Grosses and scheduled opening nights for the current Broadway season.

Internet Broadway Database

<http://www.ibdb.com/index.php>

The official database for Broadway theatre information. IBDB provides records of productions from the beginnings of New York theatre until today.

Internet Off-Broadway Database

http://www.lortel.org/LLA_archive

Provides a catalogue of shows produced Off-Broadway. For each production, includes all information available such as: title page credits, original cast members and replacements, window card photos, awards won, number of performances, etc.

The Gilbert and Sullivan Archive

<http://math.boisestate.edu/gas/>

Devoted to the operas and other works of W. S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan including a variety of Gilbert & Sullivan related items, including clip art, librettos, plot summaries, pictures of the original Gilbert & Sullivan stars, song scores, midi and mpeg audio files, and newsletter articles.

The Official George & Ira Gershwin Website

<http://www.gershwin.com/>

Official website of the Gerswhin includes bio information for George & Ira, a timeline, anthology of selected films and shows, as well as sound clips.

Musicals101.com

<http://www.musicals101.com/>

Online encyclopedia of Musical Theatre, TV and Film created by John Kenrick, an internationally recognized authority on the history of musical theatre and film and author of *Musical Theatre: A History*.

Musicals.net

<http://musicals.net/>

On-line community of musical theatre lovers to share information shows. Musicals.Net is non-commercial and is solely dedicated to being a resource on the World Wide Web.

Musical Theatre International

<http://www.mtishows.com/>

One of the world's leading theatrical licensing agencies. MTI works with the composers, lyricists and book writers to provide official scripts, musical materials and theatrical resources to over 60,000 theatrical organizations.

MTI ShowSpace.com

<http://www.mtishowspace.com/>

International online community where amateur and professional musical theatre practitioners and fans share advice, photos, videos, sets, props, costumes and more.

Rodgers & Hammerstein

http://www.rnh.com/shows_all.html

Official Website of the Rodgers & Hammerstein: An Imagem Company which owns the rights to the stage and film musicals of Rodgers & Hammerstein including *Oklahoma!*, *Carousel*, *South Pacific*, *The King and I* and *The Sound of Music*.

DVDs/Videos/Music

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