

VOLUME I | JANUARY 2018

# MTEA

MUSICAL THEATRE  
EDUCATORS' ALLIANCE



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**FRONT COVER PHOTO:**  
THE WILD PARTY | November 2018  
Book and Lyrics by Andrew Lippa  
Directed by Vicki Lewis  
Choreographed by Lili Fuller  
Music Directed by Parmer Fuller  
USC School of Dramatic Arts  
Photo by Craig Schwartz



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05 January, 2018

Dear Colleagues,

It is with great pride that I welcome you to our very first issue of the MTEA journal! I have a unique perspective on this organization, having "grown up," in a sense, with MTEA. You see, I was a student at Penn State University, performing in a production of Falsettoland, when the first conference was held in State College, PA in 1999. I remember being impressed by the gathering of colleagues from various MT programs to talk about common issues, challenges, and ambitions. It made quite an impression on all of us students.

## WE HAVE TAKEN LEAPS FORWARD IN THE LAST FEW YEARS

Flash forward to 2008. I was a new Assistant Professor at Shenandoah Conservatory, and we were hosting the annual conference. Now I suddenly found myself a member of MTEA and a colleague to the people I considered mentors. In MTEA, I found a home. I realized I could shape my career and grow as an artist and as a teacher through the comradeship that comprises this alliance. In the 10 years since that Virginia conference, I have had the great fortune to travel all over the world with this group; to present my workshops at several of our events; to connect with lifelong friends who became a mutual network for tenure and promotion support as well as a general hub for advice and counsel; and not least, to serve the organization that has given me so much, first as Regional Director, then Vice President for Conferences, and now President.

We have taken leaps forward in the last few years. We have increased membership and launched a new website. Now we are entering our next phase of growth, including another home page facelift and a total communications overhaul. We are expanding membership benefits, starting with this very journal. I look forward to seeing MTEA continue to grow and innovate and be a leading voice in the field of Musical Theatre training. And I'm so grateful to have you along as part of our MTEA family.

Sincerely,



Jonathan Flom  
President, Musical Theatre Educators' Alliance





## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Dear Readers,

Those of us who teach musical theatre are familiar with beginnings. Each Fall begins a new school year, every production has its first day of rehearsal, each recruiting season holds the promise of new students. Yes, we have to deal with middles and ends (midterms and finals and faculty meetings!), but there is so much new all around us that we are gifted with new beginnings all the time. It's a nice way to live.

And so we bring you the first issue of the MTEA Journal. This inaugural issue coincides with our January 2018 conference in Orlando. (Happy New Year!) We are delighted to introduce you to some of the new ideas contained within these digital "pages."

In this issue, you'll find peer-reviewed articles as well as several features that will appear in every issue. These include *Teacher's Toolkit*, which offers you some ideas for classroom exercises; *The Thread*, which will explore an idea from a variety of viewpoints; and *Coach's Corner*, which focuses on issues that arise during vocal coaching. This issue also contains interviews, book reviews, and more.

**WE ARE GIFTED WITH NEW BEGINNINGS  
ALL THE TIME. IT'S A NICE WAY TO LIVE.**

I hope you will consider writing something for our next issue, in 2019. Our focus is musical theatre pedagogy, so this is an opportunity for you to share your classroom breakthroughs, inventions, and theories. MTEA—whether through our old Yahoo list-serve, our new Facebook pages, or our annual conferences—has always been a great place to share ideas and be inspired by each other. We want the journal to continue that tradition.

Please get in touch if you'd like to contribute by editing, providing a book review, guest-writing a feature, or anything else. You may contact me at [journalmtea@gmail.com](mailto:journalmtea@gmail.com), or reach out to one of the Subject Area Editors.

Happy New Year, happy first issue and happy reading! And a special thank-you to VP Boyle for his help with this digital debut.

Tracey Moore  
Editor-in-Chief



MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S CIRCUS | 2015-16  
MTS-Musical! The School, Milan, Italy  
Directed by Simone Nardini  
and Marco Bellocchio  
Choreographed by Stefano Bontempi  
Photo by Giulia Marangoni

# MUSICAL THEATRE TRAINING IN AMERICA AND BEYOND:

A HISTORY OF THE MUSICAL THEATRE EDUCATORS' ALLIANCE

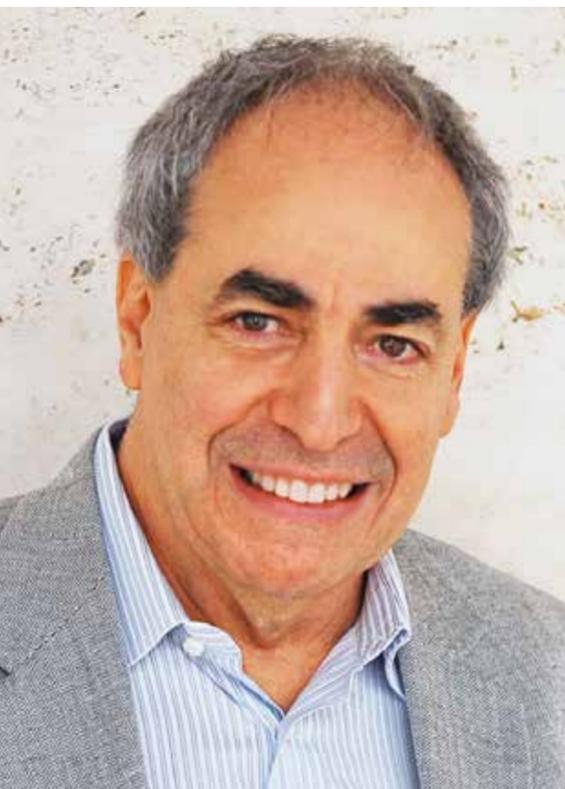
By Matthew Teague Miller



In 1998 when Cary Libkin, former Director of Musical Theatre at Penn State, interviewed for the Artistic Director position at the Struthers Library Theatre in Warren, PA, little did he know that he would be participating in a conversation that would change Musical Theatre training around the country for years to come. The voice on the other end of the line was the outgoing Artistic Director Joe Deer, Musical Theatre Professor at Wright State University.

What started as a part-interview and a part-fact-finding mission, quickly turned into a greater discussion about Musical Theatre training in the country and the challenges of running a Musical Theatre program. "It was an incredible conversation as I recall," said Libkin of the 1998 phone call, "We found that we had a lot of the same questions and challenges. In the early 90s there were several budding Musical Theatre degree programs and we thought that they must have the same kinds of questions coming up."

"I remember one of us saying, 'Wouldn't it be great to have a place where we could get together and discuss the challenges of running musical theatre programs?' We both felt like we could benefit by having a group to share ideas and support one another, and we just ran with it," recalled Joe Deer.



**Cary Libkin, MTEA Co-Founder**

The next step was to bring others into the conversation, so Libkin reached out to his friend Brent Wagner, former Chair of the Department of Musical Theatre at University of Michigan. Over a cup of coffee, Libkin shared the idea of creating a Musical Theatre Trainer's Symposium and Wagner was intrigued. In addition to the pedagogical questions raised by Libkin and Deer, Wagner suggested that the group discuss student casting issues as well as tenure and promotion questions for faculty development. As the list of discussion items grew, the demand for a meeting or conference increased.

Libkin and Deer agreed to meet in the alumni lounge of Carnegie Mellon University, their alma mater, to discuss how to proceed moving forward. They reached out to another Carnegie Mellon alumnus and classmate of Libkin's, Charlie Gilbert, Director of Musical Theatre at University of the Arts. "Cary (Libkin) and I went to school together and were both running BFA Musical Theatre Programs in Pennsylvania, just a couple of

hours away from each other," Gilbert recalls. "When Cary invited me to the first symposium, of course I was there."

Libkin and Deer decided to get a larger group of BFA program directors together to discuss if an organization would be advantageous for others. Libkin's school, Penn State, played host to the event, which only lasted one day. "That first meeting was just a small group sitting around a conference table. We asked questions like 'What would be helpful to you?' and 'How do you handle this or that?'" Gilbert said of that first meeting. Libkin recalls, "The first meeting was just the seed. It was just for Chairs or heads-of-programs. We discussed whether or not there was a need for an organization that discusses musical theatre training and pedagogy and the problems of running the program."

**PEOPLE WERE SURPRISED AND NAÏVE IN THINKING THAT MUSICAL THEATRE TRAINING WAS AN AMERICAN EVENT.  
—CARY LIBKIN**

Cary Libkin, Brent Wagner, Charlie Gilbert and Joe Deer designed discussion questions ahead of time to facilitate the conversation. Due to a family illness, Deer could not attend the first meeting. Host Libkin led most of the round-table discussions and the day culminated with the twelve guests attending Libkin's production of Falsettoland, that just so happened to feature current MTEA President, then Musical Theatre Undergrad, Jonathan Flom, as Mendel. The consensus was a resounding "Yes, there is a need for a formal organization for Musical Theatre educators to discuss pedagogy and training."

The decision was made to create the International Musical Theatre Trainer's Symposium, a yearly meeting for Musical Theatre teachers. Year-two took place at Gilbert's University of the Arts and year-three at Deer's Wright State. "We started the conversation and the idea was 'How do we encourage a vital conversation of Musical Theatre training? How do we get together with people with our same problems and interests?' And it was great from the beginning. We were all inspired and stole mercilessly from one another. As competitive as we were for top students, it was one of the best kinds of collegial experiences you could imagine," said Joe Deer of the early days of the symposium.

The organization was international from year-two, with Gerry Tebbutt coming from London to participate in the dialogue. "One thing that was so exciting and important is that the original founding people were surprised and naïve in thinking

## WE WERE ALL INSPIRED AND STOLE MERCILESSLY FROM ONE ANOTHER. —JOE DEER

that musical theatre training was an American event. We are all so fortunate to have been able to connect with our international partners and cohorts," Libkin shared. "When we started the organization there were approximately 20 to 30 programs in the country. Now there are countless," stated Gilbert. "The generational growth of the organization has even exceeded the incredible expansion of Musical Theatre programs."

It was the year-four symposium at New York University when the International Musical Theatre Trainer's Symposium evolved to become the Musical Theatre Educator's Alliance that we know today. Joe Deer drafted MTEA's bylaws and was elected the organization's first president. The participants present voted to adapt the group from a symposium to an actual organization. "I was elected president because Cary could not attend that year because of a conflict and Charlie got sick at the last minute. When it came time to vote, I was the only candidate in the room, so I won by default," Deer says.



**Joe Deer, MTEA Co-Founder**

The MTEA now boasts 64 organization members (with an additional 138 "sub-memberships" of faculty from those schools) and 107 individual members in good standing. With yearly conferences in the United States and abroad, the organization continues to strengthen Musical Theatre training around the world. "I think it's remarkable. I never imagined that it could have become what it has but at the same time, it's everything I could have possibly dreamed. I am excited that the conversation has gotten broader rather than narrower. The industry our students are going into lives in a constant state of change. It is our job to help prepare our students and (MTEA) allows that to happen on a much larger level. I'd like to see the organization continue to have a teacher-focus so that our teachers are prepared for that constant change. This is the only place where educators in musical theatre can get together and have an ongoing, vital dialogue. And I really hope to see that continue."

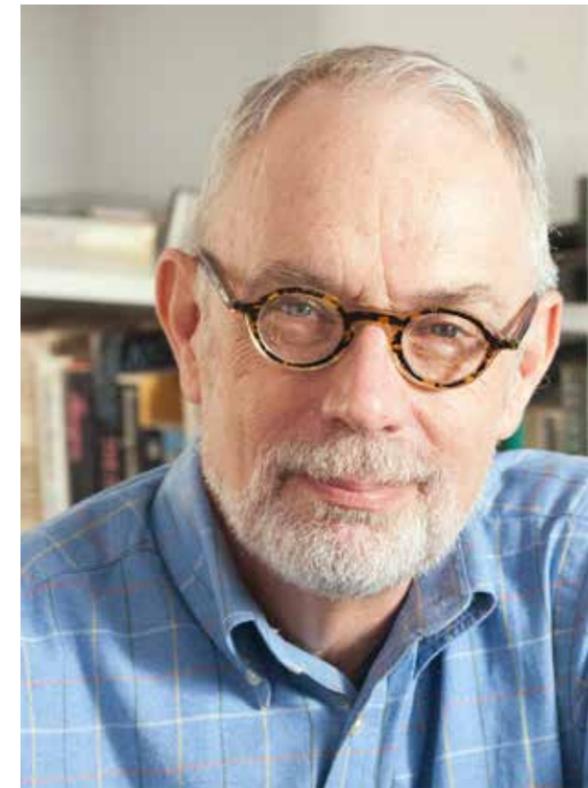
Charlie Gilbert adds, "With another decade in my professional life, I'm excited to see the continued passing of the torch and sharing of information between generations. I learn from the younger members and at the same time Cary, Joe and I can offer a certain level of wisdom and experience to our younger members. There is an incredible power in networking. New musical theatre professors often ask 'Who do I talk to? Where is my tribe?' MTEA helps you realize 'I am not alone.'"

"I think it's terrific. We have done exactly what we talked about. The organization has become a place for experienced professors to mentor and support young professors," says Libkin. "My hopes are that our organization continues to have a practical focus rather than an academic or theoretical one. Our responsibility is to teach kids how Musical Theatre works as a profession."

One great example of mentorship and passing of the torch is MTEA's current President, Jonathan Flom, who is a former student of founding member Cary Libkin. "My earliest association with MTEA was when I was a senior in Penn State's musical theater program and the first conference was held

## NEW MUSICAL THEATRE PROFESSORS OFTEN ASK "WHO DO I TALK TO? WHERE IS MY TRIBE?" MTEA HELPS YOU REALIZE "I AM NOT ALONE." —CHARLIE GILBERT

on our campus. And I remember seeing this gathering of professors from other institutions and thinking how cool it was that such a collaboration could exist. At that time, I never could have dreamed where my life would lead me, not the least of which that I would eventually become the president of that organization. However, I can say without a shred of reservation that I would not be where I am today in my career without MTEA. What I have learned from my colleagues and been able to pass on to my students is immeasurable. I am beyond proud to have been a part of the continued internationalization of musical theater education. And it is an honor to continue serving the group and pushing us forward into the next generation of the industry."



**Charlie Gilbert, MTEA Co-Founder**

# COACH'S CORNER

By Joel Gelpe



I've been music directing since 1983, and vocal coaching college students since 2006. Over the years I've observed a handful of enunciation issues that keep cropping up. Usually, making students aware of the issue is all it takes to solve it—maybe not at first, but eventually, with some pestering. But it can be helpful, too, for the student to gain a greater awareness of the tongue's position in their mouth.

I realize that there is specific linguistic lingo to describe each of the situations listed below. For instance, a linguist might describe Problem #4 (below) as follows: "the plosives /t, d/ merge with word-initial palatal approximant /j/ in a process of *reciprocal* assimilation of place and manner, and the fricatives /s, z/ have similar reciprocal assimilation with /j/." But, to paraphrase *Star Trek's* Dr. McCoy, "I'm a vocal coach, Jim, not a linguist!" So, I will attempt to describe these issues in "normal" English. And the only time I will use IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) in this article is for a glottal stop (ʔ) or for a schwa (ə).

So here are a few of the bad enunciation habits which seem to be common among the college-student crowd, some examples, and some suggestions for fixes.

**PROBLEM #1:** Turning an S into SH, when it precedes TR.

I used to think this was a Long Island habit because my college roommate, who was from Long Island, used to speak like this. But it's everywhere! Students from around the country do this. Even Michelle Obama does it!

Some students have a difficult time fixing this one. They can make the S sound, but when they get to the TR, the S unfortunately morphs

TOMMY | March 2016  
University of Northern Colorado  
Directed by David Grapes  
Choreographed by Monte Black  
Photo by David Grapes

into SH. And, because they continue to use the misplaced SH in their daily lives, the fix doesn't get enough practice.

**EXAMPLE:** "I'm doin' my strong woman number" becomes "I'm doin' my shtrong woman number"

**EXAMPLE:** "I have often walked down this street before" becomes "I have often walked down thi-shtreet before."

**SOLUTION:** First, I have the student produce an SH sound and ask them to be aware of what's going on in their mouth – the position of the tongue, the flow of the air, etc. Then I ask the student to produce a snake-like SSS sound and ask them to be aware of the new position of the SSS and how it differs from the SH. I also created a little exercise to drive these students crazy: "Strive to stroll straight down the straight street."

**PROBLEM #2:** Putting an H before a word or phrase that begins with a vowel sound. This problem usually occurs in moments of strongly felt emotion, and in pop or rock show-tunes more than in "legit" repertoire. This habit is unfortunate because singers waste a lot of breath on the extra H.

**EXAMPLE:** "I've been with girls who knew much more. I never felt confused before" becomes "Hi've been with girls who knew much more. Hi never felt confused before."

**SOLUTION:** Cases like this require the student to analyze a "glottal attack." What is a glottal attack on a vowel? It is *sound* preceding the *breath*. (Have students explore this.) Now let's do the opposite: the *breath* preceding *sound*. (This is what produces the H before the vowel sound.) Now aim for the ideal: breath and sound starting *simultaneously*. This takes a bit of work and control to make breath and sound simultaneously.

**PROBLEM #3:** Glottal stop on T in the middle of a word (like an unintended Cockney accent). I find this problem in students who have simply never been taught the correct way to pronounce a T inside a word. It can be very hard for a student to break this habit.

**EXAMPLE:** "You're lovely, absolutely lovely" becomes "You're lovely, absolu?ly lovely."

**EXAMPLE:** "Every day a little death" becomes "Every day a li?le death."

**SOLUTION:** It can be difficult to get a student with this problem to pronounce a T without over-enunciating it. When we normally pronounce a word like "little," usually it sounds more like "liddle" than "LiTTle" with an over-articulated double T. So that's where I usually start – getting the student to say "liddle," without saying either "liDDle" or "liTTle." For a word like "absolutely," it's a different challenge – for me, the solution is awareness of the tongue position. In order to pronounce the word with a glottal T, "absolu?ly," your tongue sort of floats in the middle of your mouth, touching neither the teeth nor the hard palate. To pronounce it correctly, when you get to the T, the tip

of the tongue touches the hard palate and might even touch the back of the upper front teeth or the "gum ridge," the area immediately behind the top front teeth where we commonly burn our mouths if our pizza is too hot.

**PROBLEM #4:** Assimilation. First word ends with T, next word begins with Y. The combination of the two becomes CH. Also, first word ends with D, next word begins with Y. The combination becomes J.

**EXAMPLE:** "Won't you take this advice I hand you like a brother?" becomes "Wonchoo take this advice I hanjoo like a brother?"

**EXAMPLE:** "He holds her in his arms. Would you? Would you?" becomes "He holds her in his arms. Woodjoo? Woodjoo?" (I like to tease my students and ask them if they're singing about a wooden sculpture of Tevye...get it?)

**SOLUTION:** The simplest solution is to point it out and get the student to pronounce the two words separately "won't / you;" "hand / you;" "would / you." Practice having the student gradually increase the speed while maintaining the accuracy.

**PROBLEM #5:** Elision. Dropping H inside a phrase, usually in the pronouns he, his, him, her.

**EXAMPLE:** "Will he like the girl he sees? If he doesn't, will he know enough to know?" becomes "Willee like the girlee sees? lfee doesn't, willee know enough to know?"

**SOLUTION:** Make the student aware of the problem and make sure (s)he pronounces the H in "he" every time. Gentle reminders and pestering both help.

**PROBLEM #6:** More elision. Turning "and" into "n" and "as" into "az"

**EXAMPLE:** "There may be other days as rich and rare, There may be other springs as full and fair" becomes "There may be other days az rich'n'rare, There may be other springs az full'n'fair."

**SOLUTION:** Once again, make the student aware of the problem and make sure (s)he pronounces the short A in "as" and "and," and the final D in "and."

Drop me a line at [jgelp@ithaca.edu](mailto:jgelp@ithaca.edu) and let me know if your students have any of the above habits...or others, and what are your solutions to these problems?

*The journal is seeking a variety of viewpoints, so if you'd like to guest-author or contribute to the The Coach's Corner, please contact us.*

# TEACHER'S TOOLKIT

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**Master Teachers from across the country share their insights and innovative exercises.**

In this section, we will regularly feature some new exercises you can try with your students. This week, we have three ideas to help students better act the song.

## **FROM JEREMIAH DOWNES: SENSORY ISOLATION AND EXPLORATION IN CREATING AN ENVIRONMENT**

Singing actors must do their very best to live truthfully under the imaginary circumstances of the play, and the song. This exercise is designed to isolate the five primary senses and to excite the imagination. It uses *imagined* sensory experiences and the actor's visceral responses to these experiences to create the song's environment.

Students will approach every song through the following steps, in isolation. I highly recommend having students do one sensory exploration for each of the senses per class (i.e.; every student explores *taste* in Monday's class and we move on to *sight* together in the next class, through all five primary senses).

"Oh, What A Beautiful Morning" from *Oklahoma!* will be used as an example.

Through all of the senses *except* for sight, it is recommended that student's keep their eyes closed, focusing as best they can on the primary sense for that day's work. It's

FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE FORUM | March 2017  
Weber State University  
Directed and Choreographed by Cody Walker



also recommended that student's perform songs in their entirety; this leads to greater success and yields more creative results and responses because the actor has time to let their imagination flower.

### EXERCISE 1: TASTE

Taste buds, located on the tongue, are primarily responsible for the body's intake of information and processing the results brought to the brain through the sensory organs on the tongue. Other factors that impact taste are smell and temperature. Students are encouraged to make a list of all of the tastes they would associate with the environment of their song. In "Oh, What A Beautiful Morning," an actor may encounter the following tastes:

- The taste of dry, hot air mixed with dust and pollen as it makes its way through the air hitting the back of your throat.
- Freshly churned butter atop freshly picked and cooked corn and biscuits.
- The smooth, but slightly tangy taste of fresh milk.
- The taste, and cough, of unexpected smoke blown your way from the campfire.
- Refreshing, cold tea with freshly squeezed lemon drunk from a glass jar.
- The taste of hot sweat off your upper lip.



The actor is asked to close their eyes and begin the song. The instructor finds moments to suggest the various tastes (those listed above, or others of your own creation) as sidecoaching to the actor while performing. Teacher, performer, and classmates should observe the effects of each on the actor's voice, face and body. How does the imagination cause the actor to react during their performance of the song? Do certain tastes yield a greater or lesser response? Do certain tastes seem to support the actor's investment and imagining of the world around them? Do certain tastes take the actor "out of the moment?" Do certain tastes illicit an unexpected reaction (laughter, tears, frustration)?

### EXERCISE 2: SMELL

Smell typically yields some of the strongest reactions and results from actors. The hundreds of receptors in the nose send messages about smell to the brain. As we age, sensory receptors for other senses die and do not regenerate; the sense of smell remains strong. All of us associate very specific memories and feelings to certain smells.

Follow the same steps for this as for the previous exercise.

Here are some possible smell explorations for sidecoaching "Oh, What A Beautiful Morning":

- The smell of hot wheat on the wind.
- An empty, old barn; the worn wood, hay, dirt and leather.
- Cow manure.
- Freshly baked pie.
- Lavender perfume.
- The air after a summer rain.
- Grass.
- Freshly washed linens.

### EXERCISE 3: TOUCH

Our bodies have receptors that respond to pressure, duration of pressure, and temperature, and information is sent from the nervous system to the brain. For this part of the exercise students are asked to collect tangible items for use in their isolation. For our *Oklahoma!* example, consider:

- A piece of worn leather.
- Canvas or burlap.
- Hay/grass/wood.
- A glass jar.
- A frying pan.
- A clothespin
- Freshly washed cotton.

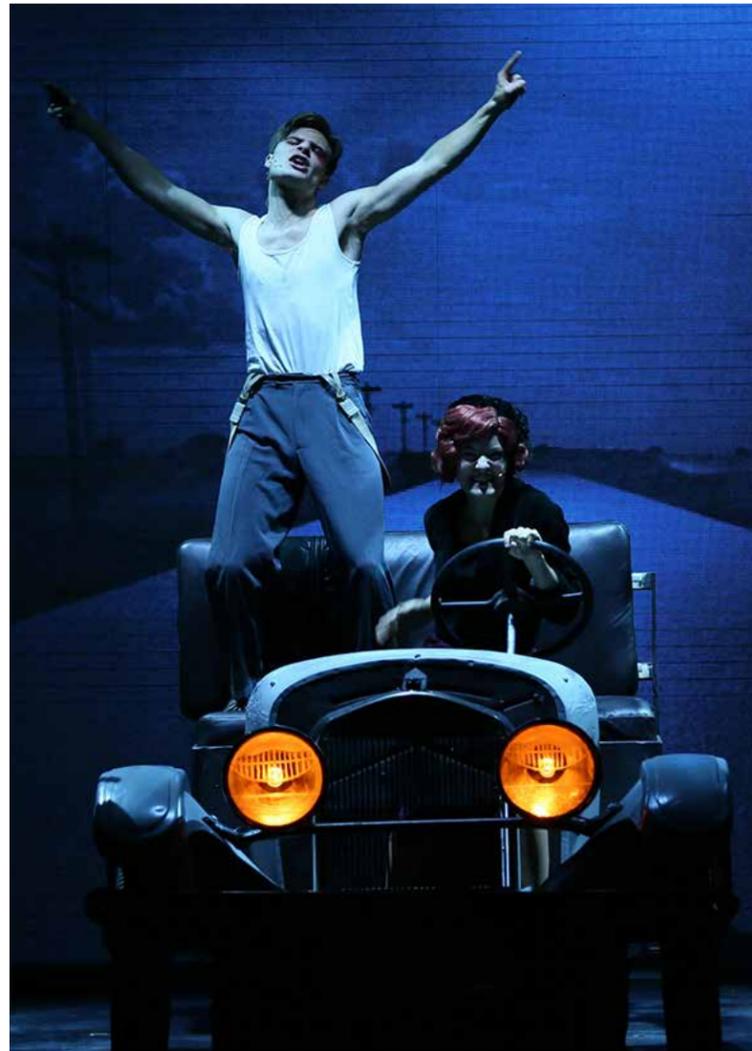
#### EXERCISE 4: HEARING

Because hearing is rooted primarily in perception but based on a variety of complex anatomical construction in the ear drum, canal, middle ear and fluid-filled inner ear, our sensory responses to sounds are like our fingerprints, unique to each individual. List of sounds to be explored for “Oh, What A Beautiful Morning” includes:

- Cowbell, and slow mooing from the nearby pasture.
- Wind through field and trees.
- The early morning chirping of birds.
- The burble of a nearby creek.
- The sound of a hammer nailing wood
- The sounds of firewood being split

#### EXERCISE 5: SIGHT

Sight comes from two primary receptors in the eye that filter light, and send signals through the optic nerve to the brain. For the purposes of this exercise, there are two phases of the sight exploration: (1) a list should be compiled of sight-driven images sidecoached to the



actor with eyes closed, as with the previous four exercises; and (2) sidecoaching the actor with eyes open, receiving instruction as to when to “see” each image. The sight-driven images from this list can be environmental (the imagined setting for the song) or contextual (images that relate to the song but are not environmental):

- A sun bleached field of endless wheat, the heat hazing the air (environmental).
- A sepia tintype of a solo cowboy (related).
- Pale blue linens flapping in the wind on a long, strong clothesline (environmental).
- The Oklahoma State flag, rough and tattered (related).

Observations and discussions about each of these five observations and responses should be discussed (there are no wrong answers; a singing actor's thoughts and responses to a sensory isolation may be abstract in one moment and objective, clear and specific in the next moment). Observers can share insight from watching their classmates perform.

#### FROM JEREMY MOSSMAN: SINGING THE PUNCTUATION

Without looking to see what is actually in the libretto or sheet music, have students sing the song, bringing out whatever punctuation they think is there. This should be done exaggeratedly: more than they normally would.

Now have students scan the lyrics and analyze the sentence structure as it is written, paying special attention to the punctuation marks and syntax. When

that is finished, have student speak both the lyrics of the song and the punctuation marks out loud (saying the words comma, question mark, exclamation mark, period, etc. as they occur in the lyrics).

Finally, have students sing the song again, maintaining an awareness of both the location and intention of each punctuation mark. As with other, similar exercises, a careful scrutiny of what is actually on the page will lead to discoveries about the song and insight as to authorial intention.



**FROM DOUGLAS S. HALL:  
ACTING IS PHYSICAL**

My acting teacher, Charles Kakatsakis, always said that acting was a physical sport. I find it true that if I can engage students' bodies while they are singing, the work is better.

**EXERCISE 1: DON'T GO**

Have the presenting student pick a scene partner. The scene partner should empty out their backpack on the floor.

The instructions for the scene partner are to "re-pack your backpack and leave the room." In contrast, the singer's job is to keep their scene partner in the room. Aside from actually hurting their scene partner, the singer can do anything necessary to keep them there.

The first round usually goes like this: the singer stands back, sings the song the way they always have and watches as their partner packs up and leaves.

I ask what happened and the singer says, "They didn't stop."

I say, "What are you going to do about that? It's your job it is keep them here."

"How am I supposed to do that?"

"I don't know, but what you just did didn't work, so, clearly, not that."

"Can I go over to them?"

"Yes!" I say. "I said you can do anything except actually hurt them."

I don't suggest any actions because I want students to think creatively and engage in their own problem solving. And the next round usually goes better. The singer starts again and approaches their scene partner and with some encouragement, they will usually take away the partner's backpack, stand in their way, block the door, preventing packing, etc.

Obviously, this is chaotic and is not the way to actually perform the song. It is not meant to be. It is only meant to generate some physical action. Do keep a close eye on things so that the physicality does not get out of hand.

After I've used the pack-up-and-leave exercise a few times it loses its efficacy for the rest of the class. So, I need to find another way.



**EXERCISE 2: PAPER BALLS**

I have all the students in the class ball up pieces of paper. While a student is singing, the rest of the class pelts them with balled up paper. The singer must pick up and throw the paper balls back at the audience. This exercise works with songs it actually fits ("Get Out and Stay Out" or "You Don't Know This Man"), but it has also gotten results with "Love Is Here To Stay."

If a singer gives up in defeat, I stand on the side and coach, "WIN! Don't take that from them, win the battle!" Students may feel the frustration of being pitted against the whole class, or, if they've managed to score a couple good hits themselves, they may feel victorious. When I ask, how was that? I get answers like "I got so mad!" or "I wanted to nail them!" They understand now what it feels like to have an authentic experience with strong physical involvement.

Finally, have the singer do the song again, but take away the paper balls. Now, everyone must do the exact same thing, but with invisible balls. The physical act of throwing is still present, but there are no objects. Then we take away the physical action but keep the intent (to win, to score, to return all the balls). Students should imagine they are throwing the balls. This is the most difficult state to maintain, and may take some sidecoaching. But the result is a very alive, physically engaged performance.

# THE THREAD

*The Thread* is a multi-voice conversation between several interested parties. This will be a recurring feature for the journal. If you would like to propose an idea for *The Thread*, please contact the Editor.

Today's topic is the Recruiting Audition process. The topic was proposed (and is moderated here) by **Sharon Kinnison (SK)**, a voice teacher, educator and director based in Louisville, Kentucky.

Also participating are:

- Audition coach **Mary Anna Dennard (MAD)**
- Southern Illinois University professor and music theater program director **Tim Fink (TF)**
- Pace University professor and music theatre program director **Amy Rogers Schwartzreich (ARS)**
- New York-based voice teacher and coach **Tom Andolora (TA)**
- Voice teacher, author, and entrepreneur **David Sisco (DS)**
- Director of theatre/associate professor at Kingsborough Community College (CUNY), **Ryan McKinney (RMcK)**

As is the case with any Facebook or comment thread, the opinions expressed below are solely those of the contributors, and do not reflect any official stance or opinion held by MTEA. *(Content has been edited for length and clarity.)*

**SK:** Of the thousands of students who make their way annually through the audition process for a theatre or a musical theatre program, young artists will audition for upwards of twelve colleges or universities while hoping to be admitted into their "first choice" school. Students wrestle with the best way to show potential professors and mentors they are the right fit for a specific program, and college and university faculty seek to recruit and audition students who will flourish in their program and beyond. Let's talk first about the number of programs students are auditioning for.



**MAD:** I find that very few of my students have a #1 top choice. Most have a small handful of schools who offer the majority of what they are looking for, but no one school has everything. I require my students give me their 3 "Must-Haves" for the program and 3 "Must-Haves" for the university. Usually some of the Must-Haves are somewhat negotiable. Like, "I would like to be able to have a study abroad option, but if the school doesn't have that, it is not a deal breaker if I really like the program training." But some "Must-Have's" might not be negotiable. Like tuition limits.

**TA:** I think having a "first choice" school is a fine goal. I think it is my responsibility to suggest schools that are not as popular but have great programs. Students are not usually aware of these schools. To tell you the truth, it's a constant education to keep myself up to date with the quality of the programs at each school and the facilities. SUNY Fredonia recently did a multi-million dollar reno to its Arts Center that includes new dance studios, acting studios, etc... it's amazing and I think bumps it up a tier. But would any of the rest of the people reading this thread even know about SUNY Fredonia?

**TF:** Speaking both as a professor of a smaller program in the Midwest (I only audition about 40-50 students each year and matriculate 6 - 10), and as a parent of a daughter currently in a MT BFA program you can ask them, "What are the must haves?" But in the end, they are 18-year-old kids, and they might make a discovery or have a campus visit that changes their views. Also, being able to go home for holidays or have family come see productions can be important for a student's mental health.

**ARS:** How many schools to audition for is very personal, but needs to be strategic. I agree with Mary Anna that each student needs a well-curated and thought-out list. There needs to be Safety schools (where no audition is required), Match school (program accepts a large amount of applicants), and Dream (programs that take a very select few). New programs are built all the time and reputations change. Your dream school from when you were twelve may be very different after you have a school visit. Every audition will have a fee of some kind and I think that budget comes into play in a big way when deciding how many schools to audition for.

**MAD:** If schools are requiring an on-campus audition, it would be helpful if they could implement a prescreen. Students are more likely to attend an on-campus audition if it is a “call-back.” Also, financial aid for mandatory on-campus college auditions for those applicants who qualify.

## PREPARATION FOR THE AUDITION PROCESS HAS BECOME AN INDUSTRY IN ITS OWN RIGHT.

**TA:** I think you are suggesting that there be financial aid available to help pay for audition expenses. Is that correct? I think that is a great idea.

**RMcK:** This conversation is very valuable. My perspective is informed by the fact that Kingsborough is an open-access theatre program, and any student can declare a theatre major. My intersection with the above audition process comes when I am advising students where to continue their studies after earning their AA (Associate’s Degree). I believe one of the strengths of our program is in preparing our students for these types of auditions, which some students may not have been equipped for right out of high school. We also work with them to create a shortlist of 4-year institutions to apply to, as time and money are frequently a significant concern.

**SK:** Preparation for the audition process has become an industry in its own right, with coaches and teachers helping students to select and prepare the best audition package. Yet, even with all this preparation, the question for the student often remains, what are they really looking for? When I help prepare students for their college auditions, the same concerns come up year after year. Students want more information about how to prepare for each specific program. The successful student understands that they are auditioning for individual programs and not merely “a bunch of colleges.” By offering a broader base of information, faculty might find their selection process more intentional.

**DS:** Performing artists of all ages will forever be asking, “What are they looking for?” And, for me, the answer is usually the same: the people behind the table don’t really know. As an adjudicator and pianist for both college and professional auditions, I have seen lots of people one would not consider conventionally “right” for a school or a role, but who were selected based on how they presented themselves in the room. To me, the better question for the students to ask is, “What can I show them of myself?” Answering this question will help the student and the teacher(s) to create a diverse audition portfolio (adaptable to a program’s unique focus or concentration) that showcases the student’s gifts.

**TF:** We have found that we do better if we treat the audition more like a coaching. We like to see how they respond. It also gives them an opportunity to audition us, to see how we work, build some rapport and maybe have a few laughs. A positive experience might be the tipping point for their decision making. One thing we do that is a little different is put our dance combo on a video on our audition webpage, the same combo that students will do at the audition. Students who have no dance background can take the time to practice before their audition. Of course this means we can’t assess how fast they pick up choreography at auditions, but we can judge other things like their potential, or their inherent expressiveness because they aren’t worried about remembering the steps. If we let them prepare a monologue and a song, why not the dance?

**MAD:** I have an idea that I believe is a practical one and one that could be easily implemented without compromising each programs’ recruitment approach. The prescreens should be standardized. Right now I have a list of 42 programs who have implemented a prescreen, each with a different set of requirements. If that stage of the audition process could be streamlined, then programs could ask for more specifics at the call-back. It would take a lot of the stress and confusion out of the college audition process.

**ARS:** I would also like to see a standard pre-screen requirement. These kids have SO much to worry about that filming twelve different pre-screens should not have to be one of them. There is no reason in my mind that those requirements can’t be the same across the board.

**TA:** I’d like to see colleges post a “Do Sing” list. There are some “Do Not Sing” lists out there, but those are less helpful. I’d like to see a list of 40 songs, with students required to pick two and prepare them. It would prevent a lot of stress. The same with monologues. Or perhaps schools can have students pick one thing from the lists provided, and then choose one thing of their own. Even that would reduce some stress.

**TF:** I like the idea of a “Do Sing” list—a positive instruction is always better than negative. But faculty could also grow up: So, you have to hear an overdone piece one more time. Big deal. You’re getting paid—it’s your job. Is that really such a hardship? You’re not there to be entertained, you’re trying to assess potential.

**ARS:** I am passionate about rep and think it can really help teach us about the person that is auditioning. I want those auditioning for us to be as prepared as possible. Best way to do this is to look at the school's showcase (if they have it) online. You can see the kinds of kids/material the school gravitates towards. Once you know this, you can make small changes based on your research—maybe change from wearing a dress to wearing pants, or sing a more contemporary song. Each program is unique and will gravitate toward certain kind(s) of applicants. That is the business, too.

**TA:** Just a quick comment on this. Students change dramatically during this period of their lives...and even in the years after. One of my classmates during a summer program was Renée Fleming. Renée was not the "big star" that summer, she was just one of the pack. There were others who got more attention than her because her voice hadn't blossomed yet. I have seen the same with musical theatre students I have taught and coached for college auditions. No, you aren't psychics, but your programs need to shake it up a little... If your school is "gravitating towards certain kinds of applicants," you may be missing out on students that you should be considering.

## WE'RE ALSO ENTERING A TIME WHEN THE TERM "WORKING ARTIST" MEANS SOMETHING VERY DIFFERENT THAN IT DID EVEN TEN YEARS AGO.

**RMcK:** I agree with Tom on this and I am going to go a step further, which might be controversial. After teaching in four-year colleges for 5 years, I have now taught in a community college setting for the past decade. It is my hope that the field of higher education will have a more expansive dialogue among and between two-year and four-year institutions, to share academic standards and increase access for all students.

**TF:** Look at the NFL (and I'm probably the only musical theatre director in America who would even say that) when they introduce players at the top of the broadcast, you'll see players from all over. Same with music theatre actors, to some extent. I hate to even say this out loud, but sometimes I think a better way to prepare for a theatre career is to get training in something else, but feverishly keep practicing, taking classes and lessons on your own. I see a lot of desperation in students around graduation time: "I got a BFA and now I have to have a career after mom and dad spent all that money."

**MA:** I tell students, "Don't try to be what the college wants. Find the college that will give you what you want." Wrong approach: Students have a list of colleges and ask me to help them "get in." Right approach: Students have a list of what they want and we find the school that gives them what they want.



BONNIE & CLYDE | June 2015  
The Danish National School of Performing Arts  
Directed by Scott Susong  
Photo by Søren Malmose

**SK:** While the mention of successful alumna can serve to attract potential students, programs should consider adding more information on websites about how the college or university works to help the student take the giant leap from academia to the real world. Beyond a senior year showcase, how does the training accomplished and relationships made during a four year program serve to support the entry into summer stock, summer internships, tours, regional theatre, and Broadway theatre? What classes are offered to help in this transition? How does the university help develop the business acumen of the young artist in addition to their talent?

**TA:** It seems to me that ten years ago Career Preparation wasn't part of the curriculum of most schools. Happily, I think that almost every college has added it. I try to go to as many showcases as I can each year since I live in NYC. I find them very helpful and quite interesting to see what the schools are turning out. I have to let you know that the venue is important. I would advise schools to spend the extra money for a decent venue.

**TF:** We have an audition class. We also have our own summer stock. We encourage students to attend various combined auditions like SETC, MWTA, UPTA, etc. We don't do a showcase, and after talking to a variety of people it seems that unless you're in one of the top programs the cost/benefit doesn't seem to be in your favor. All our seniors graduate with a website with a variety of videos, pics, resume, etc. It then is very easy for an agent or casting director to point and click and assess if they want to see more. I suspect that will increasingly be part of the process.

**ARS:** It is our job to get them as ready as possible. Both skill-wise and industry-savvy-wise. There is no guarantee in job security and I assume and hope these parents get that when they agree to pay for a theater degree. Our entire senior year is focused on career preparation and with students' access to the city, we hope that our they have used all of their resources to help with a job out of school. But a job out of school does not mean the next one is guaranteed. The industry is hard and only for the most resilient. We can only train them to the best of our ability and give them the resources to succeed. At the end of the day, if a student commits to our program they have come to some level of acceptance as to what it means to be in this industry.

**DS:** We're currently living in an age where, if we're being completely honest, there aren't too many guarantees of financial security for anyone. We're also entering a time when the term "working artist" means something very different than it did even ten years ago. Now, young artists are performing, yes, but while also running a successful web design, personal training, or head shot business. And not as a "support job," but in tandem with their successful performance career.

**RMcK:** More than 70% of my students leave Kingsborough debt-free, which is a testament to CUNY and some of the student support services that are in place. Furthermore, theatre is frequently the thing that keeps my students in school, committed to their studies and focused on a career path. Students frequently find themselves part of a community and passionate about learning and education, sometimes for the first time in their lives.

**MA:** Parents are wary about taking an a lot of debt for a career that has a high unemployment rate, and rightfully so. Programs who offer generous financial aid options are beginning to be more popular for families who look at the performing arts field from a practical standpoint. I have also noticed more colleges hiring industry professionals to head their acting and musical theatre programs knowing that getting hired is all about is "who you know," and developing a professional network. Emphasizing that fact to prospectives is a very smart thing to do and leaves an impression on families.

### **SK: Final Thoughts?**

**ARS:** We must understand that in most instances musical theater is a form that is for the privileged. How can we break down barriers of entry so we can see more diverse talent? It costs a lot of money to be in musical theater. A lot. I would love a conversation on how to move this forward. I know that on our (the university's) end there needs to be a commitment to scholarship money, but what about before that? Also, what can we do for our Trans and gender-non-conforming kids to make those who are wanting to be in this field feel safe and comfortable to audition in "their own skin"?

**RMcK:** I agree with Amy. The industry privileges certain groups, it lacks racial diversity, socio-economic diversity and non-binary gender diversity. I teach in a richly diverse college, where I am fortunate to lead a program where the majority of theatre majors are students of color. In the cases when our students finish at Kingsborough and move on to top B.A. and B.F.A. programs, they are frequently informed that they need to retake coursework they have already done. And here's the thing – many of them cannot afford to do that. It increases student debt, stalls progress toward graduation, and can make the incoming student feel inferior to their peers. So, if we want a more diverse industry, some solutions can start with us, like finding ways for students from diverse backgrounds to finish their training in a more time-efficient, cost-effective way, which invites two-year and four-year institutions to work together. I recognize there are challenges within this proposal but I am passionate about contributing to a solution.

**TF:** The theater likes to preach humanitarian principles on the stage. We need to practice them off the stage, and perhaps no better place to begin than in the audition process.

# DATABASE

Natalie Pitchford, Marketing Director of MTEA, is currently developing a searchable database of university-level programs that emphasize a musical theatre focus. This database includes basic information such as degree name, type, location, and contact person.

As an ongoing project, the database will grow to include other fields, such as number of credit hours, number of students, public or private university, age of program, and beyond. It will also eventually include international programs, but as of now is specific to the United States. This database will serve as an essential research center for musical theatre educators, prospective students, and more.

Other fields may be added upon request. Please contact Natalie at: natalie.pitchford@lovet.org.

**157** Number of schools with a musical theatre program (of any type).



**99** Number of BFA Musical Theatre programs.

**03** Number of BS Musical Theatre programs.



**11** Number of BM Musical Theatre programs.



**44** Number of BA Musical Theatre programs.

- 52** Schools in Midwestern Region
- 47** Schools in Northeastern Region
- 42** Schools in Southeastern Region
- 17** Schools in Western Region

# Diversity in the Traditional Musical:

## STAGE DIRECTING APPROACHES FOR THE CONTEMPORARY GOLDEN AGE MUSICAL

By Julio Agustin (Matos), Jr.

### Introduction

The 2016 Broadway theatre season showcased an unexpected shift in the representation of race, ethnicity, disability, and gender-neutral casting in the American Musical Theatre. For the first time in the history of the Tony Awards, African-American actors swept both the Leading and Featured Actor and Actress categories in musicals (Begley). In addition, accolades were bestowed upon the first actor in a wheelchair on Broadway, Ali Stoker, as well as others with disabilities not normally found on the Broadway stage.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, arguably the most successful theatre experience of the season, *Hamilton*, a musical by Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright/composer Lin-Manuel Miranda, confirmed that commercial theatre had finally embraced measurable advancement in *inclusive casting* – casting that mirrors our audiences and reflects the world in which we live.

Not only is the face of those winning the awards changing, but it can also be argued that the demographics of theatre-goers is expanding. The visibility of a diverse body of performers is increasing, and the numbers of those writing for and about underrepresented communities has grown exponentially. Still, with all of the positive progress made in casting for the contemporary musical, directors often stumble in the handling of musicals written in the 1940s and 1950s, also known as the Golden Age of Musical Theatre.

Efforts have been made to combat the negative stereotypes and casting issues found in older musicals, yet, it remains a challenge to confront the offensive cultural and societal codes ingrained in these works. How does one remount potentially offensive portrayals of museum pieces that contain antiquated relationships and negative stereotypes? Stage directors, including those who direct within the educational frameworks of academia, frequently opt for contemporary works rather than to risk



remounting classic musicals that some may find offensive. The challenge is to honor the works of Rodgers and Hammerstein, Lerner and Loewe, and Comden and Green while simultaneously showing deference to the reasoned sensibilities of today's socially conscious audiences.

In developing a directorial concept for my university's recent mainstage production of the quintessential Golden Age musical *Guys and Dolls* (1950), I attempted to employ a respect for traditional values and expectations while negotiating the issues of misogyny and racism that were inherent to the era and subsequently intrinsic to the piece. My goal was to address the causes, effects, challenges, and solutions for solving this problem in the academic setting.

### Terminology

Before we go further, in order to understand some of the complications of resolving

the issue of casting, it is useful to recognize the vocabulary ascribed to this area of the industry. "Non-traditional" has been the preferred term in casting for several decades, but what exactly does it mean? Taunya Lovell Banks of the University of Maryland School of Law published an article whereby she sought to clarify the definition of "non-traditional casting" by using both the *New York Times* definition of "placing a non-white in a role not specially written for a non-white actor" and the *Washington Post* definition of "the use of actors of any race, sex, ethnicity or degree of disabilities in roles for which such factors are not germane to the development of stage characters or the play" (qtd. in Banks).

Others prefer the term "color blind casting" which, according to Banks, denotes the process of casting the actor without consideration of the actor's ethnicity. However, this term has been labeled insensitive by both the Actors' Equity Association and those who work in disability services. The term is also challenging to the experienced director who recognizes that every choice made will impact the audience's experience because it assumes that artists and audiences alike will overlook physical appearance as part of the actor's type. Therefore, until another more comprehensive term, such as "inclusive casting," or even "realistic casting," becomes commonplace, "non-traditional" continues to be the most commonly used term.



## The Challenges

Integrated "book" musicals of the 1940s and 1950s are defined by their ability to incorporate narrative storytelling into their songs and dances (Kowalke 162). Broadway shows during this time performed to sold-out audiences and enjoyed long and healthy runs. However, despite the undeniable popularity of this entertainment genre in the United States, these were not the best of times for everyone in the nation.

Two areas of concern that are troubling for today's directors to confront are the characters themselves and the relationships found within librettos of this genre which often reinforce the social norms and mores of the times. Overt sexism and dysconscious racism, which is the "limited and distorted understanding . . . about inequity and cultural diversity," were the norm; and the ability to observe and understand another's perspective was not yet on most people's social and/or moral compass (King 134). The musical *The King and I*, for example, was originally proclaimed as an exotic and romance-filled depiction of "the Far East." More recently, it has been referred to by LGBTQ activist and author Christian Lewis as "a battle between sexism and racism" featuring "slavery, murder, flagellation, prostitution, polygamy, and human trafficking," (Lewis). Given these themes, it is worth noting when a professional theatre is able to undertake a production and successfully navigate the issues. The 2015 Lincoln Center production of *South Pacific*, directed by Bartlett Sher, highlighted the racism inherent both in the piece and its time. In doing so, it provided a commentary. For example, Mr. Sher's decision to stage the African-American sailors separately from those within the same infantry was one of the many subtle moments that could cause other directors great discomfort (Brantley). Sher's other options (to have only Caucasian soldiers, or to mix soldiers of different races and imply racial integration in the armed forces during that time) would have been inaccurate. Embracing such controversies is no small feat, which explains why academic institutions simply avoid staging certain older works (Figure 1).

There also existed a lack of diversity within the original acting companies of many Golden Age musicals. This unwillingness to reach out to the community of multi-ethnic performers who were ready to more authentically portray these roles was commonplace. Hit musicals such as *Kismet*, *West Side Story*, and *The King and I* prominently featured Caucasian actors in leading roles that were written for Latino and Asian characters.<sup>2</sup>

The Non-Traditional Casting Project was established by the Actors' Equity Association in 1986 "to promote the inclusion of racial and ethnic minorities, women, and the disabled in all areas of theatrical activity" (Pao 4). The 2012 report from the Asian American Performers Action Coalition describes varying levels of increases since 2006 in the number of non-Caucasian actors hired by New York producers (AAPAC). Yet despite the progress in the visibility of ethnic minorities on stage in the past few years, a major recent setback was incited by one of the professional organizations that had been entrusted to protect its membership. On November 18, 2015, the Dramatists Guild released a warning to directors everywhere:

Play licenses clearly state that “no changes to the play, including text, title and stage directions are permitted without the approval of the author” or words to that effect. *Casting is an implicit part of the stage directions; to pretend otherwise is disingenuous*, (Dale, emphasis added).

Although the statement was, in large part, put forward to protect minorities from losing roles to Caucasian actors, the unintended consequence of this was that it was now also obligatory to hire a white actor if this was indicated in the playwright’s character description. Given the disparity in the number of roles available to people of color versus those written for Caucasian actors, this statement could serve to reduce the number of non-white actors cast. The estate of Edward Albee recently rejected a non-traditional casting choice for *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf* at Oregon’s The Complete Works Project. That is, perhaps, the freshest example of this adherence to the authority of play licensors (Simon).

Additionally, the convention of reinforcing negative stereotypes for comedic effect, especially among the featured characters, was prevalent in the musicals of this period. There are those who consider Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein’s sensitivity to racial tolerance and gender equality in their 1951 Broadway musical *King and I*

## SOME HAVE CALLED FOR THE CESSATION OF PRODUCING THESE WORKS UNTIL THE POSITIVE PORTRAYALS OF ETHNICALLY DIVERSE CHARACTERS EQUAL THOSE THAT PERPETUATE THE NEGATIVE.

commendable, given the times. Yet conventions such as the prominent knife-wielding Puerto Rican gang members of *West Side Story*, or the pipe-toting Native American in *Annie Get Your Gun* reinforce negative or limiting stereotypes. During this era, it was deemed unnecessary to reach out to those who might have been able to inspire greater authenticity in the development of the script; the negative stereotypes went unchallenged.

Although examples of non-traditional casting decisions in high-stakes commercial musical theatre are becoming more mainstream, there appear to be very few examples of this in Golden Age revivals. Audra McDonald is still one of the only African-American actresses who has been able to transcend race in musical theatre; her “Carrie Pipperidge” in the 1994 Nicholas Hytner version of *Carousel*, and “Lizzie” in *I 10 in the Shade*, are the most well-known examples of non-traditional casting in a Golden Age revival. (Sher’s insistence on actors of Asian descent for *King and I* has been less publicized.)

Arena Stage’s 2011 production of *Oklahoma!* represents a recent example of non-traditional casting in a Golden Age musical that advanced the perception of what is often seen as representative of the American landscape. One reviewer wrote:

The breakthrough of director Molly Smith’s production is in fusing the making-of-America ethos of “Oklahoma!” — set at the turn of the 20th century, before the territory achieved statehood — to a more modern understanding of how the country’s composition is utterly dynamic. Thus, Aunt Eller (an amusingly persnickety E. Faye Butler) and Laurey are black; Curly is played by a Latino; the lead cast and ensemble include other actors and dancers who are white, Asian American and African American (Marks).

This production also shattered box office records, thereby proving that audiences are prepared to accept this change (Healy). (As an olive-skinned Latino actor/dancer with dark, curly hair; my own experience performing in a professional production of *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* as “Brother Benjamin” proved that, much like the spectators of Arena Stage, audiences were prepared to accept differences in features and complexions in our family unit despite my having six blond Caucasian “brothers.”)

In seeking solutions to the issue of inclusivity in casting for the Golden Age musical, specifically those containing culturally insensitive traditions, some have called for the cessation of producing these works until the positive portrayals of ethnically diverse characters equal those that perpetuate the negative. Unfortunately, a balance of equality is not only a problem for persons of color. There is enduring discrimination in roles for women over forty and actors with disabilities, as well as an overall disparity in gender equality. Although female playwrights like Bekah Brunstetter and others caution against “blindly program[ing] a play by a woman just because it is a woman,” a call to action was made by the Goodman Theatre’s longtime artistic director Robert Falls who remarked that he has always been conscious of this balance when choosing his season. In fact, Falls’ record is respectable: forty-seven percent of the plays that he has produced have been written by women (Evans).

### Case Study: *Guys and Dolls*

*Guys and Dolls* was written in 1949 and is considered by many to be the “perfect” Golden Age musical—with brilliantly carved comedic characters, entertaining (if not culturally appropriate) dances, a compelling script, and a memorable score—yet my recent university production yielded more questions than answers with respect to casting. While maneuvering the requirements outlined by the copyright holders, such as those specifically delineating male and female characters, without infringing upon casting restrictions, we were able to include in our production a redistribution of gender-specific roles, including a female gambler (figure 2). Additional non-traditional casting choices were made with the inclusion of an actress over forty, a homosexual Hot Box couple, an interracial romantic leading pair (figure 3), a featured actor with a learning disability, and a leading lady who towered over her male counterpart. As revealed during an audience talk-back, some attendees observed that our casting decisions allowed for an environment in which women were in charge at the Hot Box Nightclub, while also showcasing various facets of women as opposed to the more



common overly-sexualized version. The inclusion of the female gambler, on the other hand, seemed interesting if not confusing to some who wondered whether she was intended to represent a transsexual character.

Despite these attempts at leveling the gender playing field through casting choices, issues of misogyny remained deeply ingrained in

the script. My creative team—which included females in the roles of choreographer, associate director, and dramaturg—paid close attention to the script's innate challenges and proposed solutions to each. One such challenge appeared in the Havana scene in which Sarah Brown reluctantly agrees to go on a date to a nightclub in Havana with Sky Masterson. While there, she orders a milkshake, but is handed an alcoholic drink instead. The prevalence of alcohol abuse and date rape on college campuses necessitated a reworking of this event in the script. With the team's guidance, the actress portraying Sarah Brown took a pause at the moment of realization in the scene, then made the choice to *knowingly* ingest the alcohol, thereby making the conscious decision to “let her hair down” and enjoy the evening's adventures. Furthermore, in allowing herself to drink enough to release her inhibitions, her big Havana number “If I Were a Bell” was no longer an ode to inebriation as is more commonly staged, but rather a euphoric recognition of a world, and feelings, that she had never allowed herself to feel until this point. This moment gave our Sarah Brown greater strength and agency not typically found in traditional revivals of the piece. All of this was done without changing a single word of the script.

This balance of authenticity and contemporary sensitivity was important to our company of student actors. The ability to find balance empowered the students to make the most informed choice despite the innately sexist material. The actor portraying Sky Masterson articulated that he felt compelled to “demonstrate where we have come from, as well as where we still have to go, as men in our society.” Rather than avoiding some of his character's traditionally condescending and arrogant speeches about relationships and women, he opted instead to highlight those traits, allowing for greater conflicting moments and opening the door for audiences to question their own comfort level regarding the acceptability of these behaviors.

One final casting choice impacted many in the company, yet likely went unnoticed by

most in the audience. We were grateful to have collaborated with our campus' Office of Disability Services, who helped to spread the word of our auditions and our desire to cast inclusively. We were thus able to cast a student with registered disabilities in a principal role. Although the expectations to produce were the same for everyone, the management of this student's particular needs—extra time for line memorization, greater clarity in direction, additional private rehearsals—was important to both the work and, subsequently, the final product. The disability was not apparent to the audience in performance; still, during the post-mortem, the actor expressed gratitude for the immense impact that the experience had in helping them to envision a place for themselves in this industry. This statement was met with resounding applause by castmates.

Both actors and the audiences alike commented that our production embraced diversity in all of its forms, as well as presented relationships that were not acceptable, or even legal, in our country in the 1940s yet seemed completely unremarkable in our production. The homosexual Hot Box dancers, Nathan Detroit and Adelaide's interracial relationship, and the inclusion of the female gambler were not intended to draw focus; *they were simply a natural extension of the world of the play*. Our production sought to honor the traditional while also seeking to make the relationships relevant to our community and, most especially, our student audiences. As with every casting decision, the final selection of actors was dictated by the limits of the audition pool; yet their character choices evolved from the freedom they were given to build and make decisions to personalize their work.

Those of us who teach musical theatre are charged with introducing our students to the whole canon, which includes older works. Without some updates, students may construe that the Golden Age musical is, in fact, a museum piece lacking in originality and devoid of the potential to become relevant to, or have impact on a contemporary audience. Professional companies are making choices to increase relevance and impact for their audiences as well. Bill Rauch, the long-time artistic director of Oregon Shakespeare Festival, said, “We in leadership positions need to do everything we can to reflect the world we live in” (Burluson). Rauch challenged the Rodgers and Hammerstein Organization; consequently, the Oregon Shakespeare Festival will be showcasing the groundbreaking Golden Age musical *Oklahoma!* next year with what he calls “an LGBT makeover” featuring a lesbian “Curly,” a male “Ado Annie” (now “Ado Andy”), and a transgender “Aunt Eller” (Burluson).

## Conclusion

And so we are called to educate our students and challenge our audiences. In doing so, we test the boundaries of the traditional musical. Our production of *Guys and Dolls*, although not at all perfect and still inherently sexist, was proof that there is room for non-traditional casting and re-interpretation even in what many consider to be one of the most perfect musicals ever written, and that even small shifts are rewarded by student interest and support. Directors in the academic setting must take risks, seek diverse talent, and embrace a more heterogeneous team of collaborative artists with a different range of human experiences than those of our own. In doing so, we educate through our choices.

## Figure Captions

Figure 1: *The King and I*, Yul Brynner, Deborah Kerr, 1956. TM and Copyright © 20th Century Fox Film Corp. All rights reserved. Courtesy: Everett Collection.

Figure 2: The Gamblers in 'Luck Be a Lady Tonight' in James Madison University's production of *Guys and Dolls* (Photo by Richard Finkelstein, 2017).

Figure 3: Brent Comer and Selena Clyne-Galindo as 'Nathan Detroit' and 'Adelaide' in James Madison University's production of *Guys and Dolls* (Photo by Richard Finkelstein, 2017).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Deaf West Theatre's *Spring Awakening*, directed by Michael Arden, transferred to Broadway with a cast of hearing and non-hearing actors in the leading roles. The production was honored with three Tony Award nominations and won a Drama League Award for Unique Contribution to the Theatre (Dziemianowicz).

<sup>2</sup> Established Caucasian actors Alfred Drake, Carol Lawrence, and Yul Brenner received raves for their performances of characters of Middle Eastern, Puerto Rican, and Thai descent respectively in librettos replete with negative stereotypes and cultural appropriations.

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# Monologuing The Music

By Nicole Stinton



When preparing a piece of musical theater for performance, most actors and directors place more emphasis on the lyrics and spoken text (dialogue) than on the music when it comes to characterization, relationship and other acting and staging choices. Rehearsal practices commonly include a thorough dissection of the verbal text ("table work"), while music analysis receives comparatively less attention. Further, the separation of singing and acting into separate classes and rehearsals, a practice found both in the industry and at training institutions, can prevent a holistic, combinatory approach to verbal and musical texts on the part of the actor (de Mallet Burgess & Skilbeck 9-11, 111-112). Through nearly two decades of professional practice as a director, actor, and vocal coach of musical theater, and more recently in my research as a PhD candidate, I have consistently found that when actors pay attention to the music elements of a songs when making character choices, they uncover hitherto unnoticed dramatic insights and, most importantly, use this awareness to create another layer of characterization and complexity.

Any reference to the text of a musical usually denotes the scripted words: those that are to be spoken and/or sung during performance (see Stanislavski and Rumyantsev; Burgess and Skilbeck; Kayes; Ostwald; Bond; and Hamilton). It is acknowledged that focusing on the text as a source for acting choices in musical theater is beneficial (see Thomas; Purdy), and "monologuing the lyrics" (divorcing the lyrics of a song from its music) is frequently employed as a technique (see Clark 84; Craig 1; Dunbar 66-67; Henson and Pickering 55-56; Kayes 175; Lucca 42; McWaters 49-50; Moore 160-164; Richardson 12-13), but seldom the reverse. If we consider musical elements to be defined as information notated in a musical's score to be either sung by actors or played by instrumentalists, the extent to which actors draw upon these elements is often restricted to learning which notes to sing when, in

what order, for how long and, at most, what style to sing them in, something that renowned actor and teacher Constantin Stanislavski referred to as “academic singing” (Stanislavski & Romyantsev 21). I posit that a failure to balance text exploration with a comparable musical investigation can lead to an over-reliance on “What am I saying?” at the expense of “How am I saying it?”

Music theatre composers, like lyricists and book writers, specifically choose what goes into their music and what does not (see Clark 82; de Mallet Burgess and Skilbeck 150-151; Ostwald; Major and Laing; Henson and Pickering; Deer and Dal Vera 55-56; Moore 96-99). Increasingly, music specialists are advocating that actors need to pay more attention to the clues offered them by composers in the score in order to make characterization choices. For example, musical director Kristof Van Grysperre strongly argues that “[d]iscovering and shaping a character begins with the opening of the score. The more we explore the [verbal] text and music, the more the character will grow” (Lucca 108). Conductor Stephen Purdy asks actors to pay attention to the music when they are acting because “[m]usic can be, in and of itself and by its nature, both affirmative of the [verbal] text and sometimes contradictory of it” (174). In the UK, composer and musical director Paul Harvard encourages actors “to look at the music separately from, and as thoroughly as, the lyrics” when undertaking acting processes (91). Theatre professor David Roesner, known for his research in the musicality of theatrical performance, reminds us that for actors today, using a play’s musicality can become an important component of the acting toolkit (229). This is true whether they are working on a classical script, such as one by an Elizabethan playwright, or on a new piece of contemporary writing. In fact, the renowned Peter Kivy, together with many other musicologists, have argued that since the Renaissance period, composers of vocal songs have been using music to express intense emotional qualities that words alone are unable to convey (chapter 3). Because of music’s ability to express character, emotion, and other dramatic elements, actors who are preparing a role overlook it at their peril. My experience as a professional director confirms that music analysis of this type is skipped entirely in dramaturgical processes—likely due, in some part, to the discomfort that many directors, who are untrained in musical analysis, feel about their skills in this area.

I have developed a process and repertoire of activities that can assist actors to easily and consistently access and utilize the music to make character choices. This method is designed to be versatile and works well for any style of musical theater, with actors, directors and vocal coaches, with those who have music literacy and those who do not, whether in the USA, UK, Singapore, or Australia, and with professionals and students alike. My approach includes exercises such as “A Shakespearean Approach” (transferring the terminology used when analyzing heightened spoken language to musical theater works), “Putting the Beat in your Feet” (a physical approach to analyzing meter and rhythm) and “Speaking Music” (adopting non-traditional musical terminology to reflect on and discuss music).

A fourth activity, which is the topic of this article, is what I call “Monologuing the Music.” It focuses on actors making their own creative acting decisions using not only what they have been given to say (the words), but also how they have been tasked with communicating them (the music). It offers a method for actors to question how

they themselves might interpret the use of a particular musical element, irrespective of how consciously a composer, lyricist or book writer might have inbuilt character or other dramatic information into the text/words/lyrics.

The basic premise of music-monologuing as part of the rehearsal acting process is that the actor removes one component of the song in order to fully explore another. They do so in the belief that once exposed, the latter will yield information useful to building character or exploring the character’s situation. To monologue the music the actor sheds the lyrics of their song and communicates instead solely through the music.

A first step is to have the actor sing the melody aloud to a sound of their choice, such as “ma,” “dah,” or an open vowel such as “ah.” Concentrating on the music in this way is a reversal of the already popular acting practice of monologuing the lyrics mentioned earlier. By applying this monologuing principle to the music, instead of the lyrics, the composer’s offer of musical devices becomes much more evident to the actor, including not only meter, rhythm, pause and phrasing, but also pitch. Such musical conventions that were previously masked by the lyrics are suddenly more easily able to be heard. Compositional choices that are subtle or hidden among rich texture (such as diverse instrumentation) become clearer.

In my own work, I have found that monologuing the music is not merely **likely** to yield information helpful to the acting process, it frequently uncovers information that is not highlighted **until** the lyrics are taken away. Once the music is exposed, it becomes far more accessible to actors, particularly to those who are music theory novices. As composer and musical director Rob Kapilow has said, “[a]ll you have to do is listen,” for once the actor is listening well and noticing the musical components, they



are far more likely to be confident and effective in their ability to dissect the music in the first place.

A next step is for the actor to reflect on, discuss, or write about their discoveries in whatever way they choose. For those actors who are fluent in music literacy, I encourage them to interpret the music drawing on music theory knowledge and terminology. For those that are not, however, or if their classmates or company peers with whom they are rehearsing are not, then I encourage the actors to use any descriptors they are comfortable with. Usually after a monologuing the music exercise, I will ask the actor what stands out to them from the process they just completed. If, for example, they reply describing that the music goes “up in jumps” and “down in steps,” then I will use this same vocabulary to ask them what the “up jumps” and “down steps” might reveal about their character. If the actor focuses on a “vast succession of quick notes that are interrupted by a long pause,” then I might provoke them to consider why the composer has chosen both to “interrupt” and to “pause.” This step of monologuing the music need not rely on an actor needing to read music, to have a lexicon of music terminology at hand, nor to apply theoretical knowledge of intervals, rhythmic notation, tonality, etc. It can be successfully undertaken by an individual at any music theory level.

In a recent workshop, a group of actors were asked to prepare “For Forever” from *Dear Evan Hansen* by Pasek and Paul for performance, paying particular attention to character journey and dramatic action. Although the actors were in-character and purposeful during their presentations, those observing agreed that all performers lacked specificity and spontaneity. The acting participants then applied three music-

## INCREASINGLY, MUSIC SPECIALISTS ARE ADVOCATING THAT ACTORS NEED TO PAY MORE ATTENTION TO THE CLUES OFFERED THEM BY COMPOSERS IN THE SCORE IN ORDER TO MAKE CHARACTERIZATION CHOICES.

monologuing exercises, sometimes using rhythmic clapping and at other times non-lexical vocables (such as “ma” or “da”), to explore the excerpt’s beats, pauses and rhythms. After vastly slowing down the tempo (speed) to repeatedly monologue these three, unpitched musical elements on short sections of the musical text, the actors were largely unanimous regarding what they discovered.

Initially, they hadn’t identified the music’s significant dramatic contributions, nor had they felt or expressed their impact. After monologuing the music, many clues emerged, including an awareness that the character Evan had to wait fractionally before vocalizing the first notes of many phrases, by beginning on either the second semi-quaver or quaver of beat one. That is, the character started singing such phrases after an unexpected, very short, pause. The actors also had not consciously responded to the syncopated (off-beat) rhythm across the phrases (the unusual strong off-beats are **bolded** below), nor had they been aware that these were continuously broken mid-singing with gaps (pauses).

[Pause] **End** of May [pause] or **Early June**  
**This** [pause] picture **perfect** [pause] **afternoon we share**  
Drive the winding **country road**  
[Pause] Grab a scoop **at** [pause] “A La **Mode**”  
And then we’re **there** [pause]

[Pause] An open field that’s framed with **trees**  
**We** pick a **spot** and [pause] shoot the breeze  
Like **buddies do**  
**Quoting songs** by our **favorite bands** [pause]  
**Telling jokes** no **one** understands  
Except **us two** [pause]  
And **we** [pause] **talk** [pause] **and** take **in** the **view...**  
(Pasek & Paul 2015)

Some actors interpreted the delayed starts, syncopation and broken phrases as indicators of Evan’s anxiety disorder, using each instance to reveal an aspect of his agitation, nervousness and trepidation. Others consciously used these pauses and syncopated trip-ups by Evan to improvise, in a step-by-step sequence, the fabricated





tale of the supposed friendship between Evan and suicide victim Connor. Yet other actors focused on using the pauses for their Evans to take deep, quick abdominal breaths, coupled with clear mental determination, to draw on previously repressed tenacity and battered inner courage to reach out to Connor's listening parents.

These choices enabled the actors to be more in-the-moment during performance, to have more variation as they sang and began to reveal more layers of complexity than they had in their first presentations of the song. These revelations also helped the actors to establish the given circumstances and Evan's relationship with the parents. In other words, the interpretation of the musical dramaturgy caused the actors to reflect upon the larger dramaturgy, and to consider ways to integrate it into a more holistic, forward-moving interpretation across the song. Those watching commented that the actors seemed far less generalized and ambiguous in their character choices and that actors appeared to be seeing various images in their minds-eyes. Observers felt this final interpretation was "realistic," and many claimed that they became so involved in the character's experience that they "forgot they were watching a play."

Next, let us consider a potential interpretation of the character of Clara Johnson in *The Light in the Piazza*. (Please note that the reading below is not intended to be definitive; rather, it provides one example of the kind of material revealed to actors in workshops.) If the actor playing Clara were to only monologue the lyrics for the title song by Adam Guettel, she may easily identify that the first key word in each line is that which would naturally be accented in speech (**bolded** below), and thus focus on using these words to reveal characterization and situation insights:

I **don't** see a miracle shining from the sky



I'm **no** good at statues and stories OR I'm no **good** at statues and stories  
 I **try**  
 That's **not** what I think about  
 That's **not** what I see  
 I **know** what the sunlight can be  
 The **light**, the light in the Piazza...  
 (Guettel 54-56)

This vocabulary indicates that Clara is aware of her underdeveloped cognition levels and also suggests from a psychological perspective that the character focuses more on negative, at the expense of her positive, attributes. Such insights are no doubt helpful to the actor when creating the character. However, there are also key indicators in

the music that could be seen to challenge this verbal interpretation. Instead of accenting words typically emphasized in speech, Guettel often places the aforementioned important words on off-beats and therefore unaccented pulses (now *italicized* below). Furthermore, the writer most often places these directly after the first and strongest beat of each bar (**bolded** below). The result is that pronouns such as "I", and definite articles such as "that" and "the," words that are not typically considered important, receive our attention:

I *don't* see a miracle shining from the sky  
 I'm *no* good at statues and stories  
 I **try**  
**That's** *not* what I think about  
**That's** *not* what I see  
 I *know* what the sunlight can be  
**The** *light*, **the** *light* in the Piazza  
 (Guettel, 54-56)

It would be unusual for an actor monologuing the text to emphasize "That" in the fourth and fifth lines, and it would be extremely rare for participants to naturally accent "the" in the last line. Yet, Guettel's music calls for just this. By monologuing the music (vocalizing only with an open vowel sound or non-lexical vocables) the musical emphasis given to "the" in "the light" is highlighted. From that exploration, the actor might deduce that there is a solidness (THE light) in the quality of Clara's light. It could be that the actor identifies that the stress on simplistic words reveals Clara's underdeveloped cognitive level and her child-

THE SONGS IN A JUKEBOX MUSICAL OFTEN FEATURE MUSIC AND LYRICS NOT WRITTEN FOR A THEATRICAL PURPOSE. YET, THE ACTOR IS STILL REQUIRED TO DISCOVER CHARACTER THROUGH THE MUSIC AND LYRICS, AND MONOLOGUING THE MUSIC CAN PROVIDE SOME CLUES.

like nature. The shifting of typical keywords to a position after the naturally stressed downbeat could suggest that Clara's perception of the world is different than everyone else's.

The songs in a jukebox musical often feature music and lyrics not written for a theatrical purpose. Yet, the actor is still required to discover character through the music and lyrics, and monologuing the music can provide some clues. When speaking the words "Mamma mia," from the jukebox musical of the same name (Andersson, Ulvaeus & Johnson, 52-56), we discover an Italian accent rhythm which naturally swings the words, with the first and third syllables having longer durations than the second and fourth: MAA-ma MEE-ah. But when these two words are sung in the show, they are evenly spaced across time, and each syllable receives the same duration: ma-ma-me-ah. Monologuing the music would make this contrast starkly apparent. If we interpret the composer's choice as an effort to create a more heightened sense of urgency or indicate negative subtext of some kind, then the pause (two-beat rest) that occurs directly afterwards can be seen to extend the dramatic tension, which is then further developed through the on-beat double emphasis of the next "My, my."

When actors listen to and experiment with the musical elements of their songs as a part of the acting process, they uncover previously unnoticed components that offer dramatic insights, prompt further dramaturgical questioning, and assist in characterization. The process leads towards a more holistic interpretation of the song, producing links and resonances between music and text, scenarios and rhythmic pacing. Justifying every component of the texts provided them by both authors—lyricist and the composer—enables the actor to synchronize *what* they say with *how* they say it, at all times. It enables them to avoid acting generalizations, and to endow the same specificity to their music as they give to their words. This is key to creating authentic, multi-layered characters that the audience can believe in.

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# Playwright Choreographers

By Annette Thornton

*Burn the Floor* opened for a limited engagement on July 25, 2009 at the Longacre Theatre on Broadway. This Broadway debut was late in coming, since *Burn the Floor* had been touring internationally since its creation in 1997. (The show, or some form of it, continues to run both in theaters in Australia and Japan, and on cruise ships.)

Prominently displayed on the show's official website were the words "Ballroom. Reinvented." as well as a picture of one of the show's producers, Carrie Ann Inaba, one of the original judges on the reality television show, "Dancing with the Stars." The choreographer for *Burn the Floor* was (and still is) Jason Gilkison, who was also the guest choreographer on the fourth season of "So You Think You Can Dance" (SYTYCD), a reality-television competition dance show. The 2009 official website offered the following description:

*Burn the Floor* is a breathtaking blend of Latin and Ballroom dance. . . . It takes audiences on a journey through the passionate drama of dance. The elegance of the Viennese Waltz, the exuberance of Jive, the intensity of the Paso Doble—audiences experience them all, as well as the Tango, Samba, Mambo, Quickstep and Swing. It's Ballroom dance with a sexy 21st century edge.

When positioned as theatre, this kind of dance-travanganza, featuring dancers and choreographers from the world of reality-show competition, distorts our work in musical theatre dance training. It blurs our students' thinking about musical theatre dance and choreography.

The rise of competitive dance studios in hometowns as well as the popularity of reality television programs such as "Dancing with the Stars" and "So You Think You Can Dance" (hereafter DWTS and SYTYCD) create a range of challenges for many students who matriculate into our musical theatre programs. Trophy-winning freshmen who have excelled in one area, such as lyrical, hip-hop, or even ballroom, may be confused when asked to bring acting choices to their dancing. Although familiar with the ways in which flash, tricks, and skin are used by DWTS and SYTYCD to "wow" an audience, some students may not yet have been exposed to the subtleties of dance as a powerful storytelling medium. While I do not subscribe to museum theatre, my position in this article is that choreographers must reclaim their positions as contributing "writers" of the musical: we must re-embrace the

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importance of storytelling through choreography, in the historic tradition of Agnes de Mille and Jerome Robbins as well as the new work of choreographers like Bill T. Jones, Kathleen Marshall, and Steven Hoggett.

## BACKGROUND

Beginning in 1943, with her ground breaking work on *Oklahoma!*, Agnes de Mille introduced a gestural vocabulary that made dancing an integral part of the dramatic action. In 1957, Jerome Robbins brought Stanislavski's method to his approach as director/choreographer on *West Side Story*, and the triple threat performer—one who must sing, act, and dance, all equally well—was born. The next decade was filled with shows that required this kind of performer, from *Sweet Charity* to *Fiddler on the Roof*. The demand of this triple threat performer changed in 1967 with the production of *Hair*.

In an interview at the Public Theatre, *Hair*'s co-author James Rado described how the creative team was looking for a special type of person who was “natural” and who had a wonderful voice—long hair a plus. The grueling audition process (several thousand auditioned over a two-month period) was necessary because co-authors Rado and Jerome Ragni and director Tom O'Horgan wanted to create a reality onstage that was parallel to what they saw on the streets and in parks. They identified ‘types’ that did not work: actors that were more legitimate and “real Broadway dancers” because of the way they moved their bodies (Rado 2008). *Hair* is an important benchmark because the production also ushered in a type of natural movement onstage that swung the choreographic pendulum in the opposite direction of de Mille's gestural storytelling. The natural movement style in *Hair* paralleled a more ‘pedestrian’ movement aesthetic that could also be found in the mainstream dance world with choreographers such as Twyla Tharp and Bill T. Jones—and even the late Merce Cunningham.

More recent choreographic approaches fall in between the two extremes above. What I call a gestural phrase appeared in two productions: *Spring Awakening* (2006), choreographed by Bill T. Jones, and *Once* (2012), with movement by Steven Hoggett. A gestural phrase is a series of movements stemming from the characters' inner thoughts, desires, conflicts, and/or expressive emotion. In *Spring Awakening*, the adolescents repeat a phrase that includes gestures such as both hands caressing the sides of the face, circling both breasts, crossing over the abdomen, outlining the hips, and finally extending forward and down. This gestural phrase is introduced by Wendla in “Mama Who Bore Me,” then later repeated by other characters during “The Bitch of Living” at an accelerated tempo so that it took on a frenzied feeling.

In *Once*, Hoggett created a movement score for the workers in the bank when She and He go to ask for a loan. Three workers are seated at desks, and they begin a gestural phrase that includes reaching movements that are restricted by their confined seated positions. There is a feeling of being trapped at their desks, unable to leave. The reaching goes nowhere, but folds back in on itself and repeats, as if to convey futility in trying. This stagnancy is juxtaposed with He and She's request

for a loan in order to record his musical compositions. Unlike the bank workers, He and She are successful in breaking out of their situation.

Both Jones and Hoggett used gestures to expand upon the narrative aspects of the respective libretto and illuminate the characters' emotions. In this way, they extend the legacies of de Mille and Robbins by allowing narrative and character to drive the movement choices.

## CHOREOGRAPHERS MUST RECLAIM THEIR POSITIONS AS CONTRIBUTING "WRITERS" OF THE MUSICAL

Jones created the movement and choreography for *Spring Awakening* organically—by asking the performers to say words from the libretto and move their bodies in ways that responded to the word, both in sound and meaning. Jones has explained his approach: “Dancers don't question why they do something. But actors need to understand motivation for gesture and movement. For *Spring Awakening*, I was trying to find a language of rebellion” (qtd. in Sulcas). Jones's choreographic storytelling was noted by New York Times theatre critic Roslyn Sulcas:

Mr. Jones's choreography for *Spring Awakening* creates a seamlessly integrated, vivid gestural vocabulary that gives force and life to the repressed physical urges of its teenage characters. Only their bodies, it suggests, can express those feelings, for which they have no words. In some ways, it's a perfect fit for a choreographer concerned with storytelling, the power of gesture and sexual identity.

Hoggett, a member of the British theatre company Frantic Assembly, is more of a movement artist than a dancer. After seeing the play, *Black Watch*—with Hoggett's movement-driven storytelling of Scottish soldiers in Iraq—director Michael Mayer said he knew that Hoggett was “the person he needed to achieve the kind of non-dance he envisioned for [*American Idiot*]'s non-stop music” (Gold). Hoggett explained his approach to choreographing *American Idiot*: “I knew I couldn't make a show that had MTV-style choreography in it. If you're going to tackle a Green Day show, you have to stay true to the spirit that made that work. Lines of dancers would have ruined it. . . . Push the story forward. . . . That is what I am about” (qtd. in Gold). Hoggett's work in *Once* included moments of breath and of stillness, which were a welcome contrast to the spectacle of the other shows (*Bring it On*, *Matilda*, *Kinky Boots*) running at that time.

## CHALLENGES FOR COLLEGE TRAINING

My colleague and retired director of the dance program at Central Michigan



University, Yvette Birs Crandall, has identified a shift in young dancers' work habits, which she attributes to the rise in competitive dance studios. As a dance studio owner/teacher in the late 1970s to the early 1990s, I myself felt an increasing pressure to become a competitive studio, an identity that I did not embrace. Although I no longer have a dance studio, I always feel at home in one. However, more and more often what greets me when I enter a studio is not the smell of rosin and sweat, but the sight of a display case stuffed full of ribbons and trophies.

There are differences between dancers who come out of competitive studios versus those who do not, most notably in the amount of time spent on technique. Competitive studios must, because of time constraints, spend more time rehearsing for performance (improving the dance) and less time developing and perfecting technique (improving the dancer). Instructors may begin the year with a few weeks of technique, but soon classes shift so that, after a warm-up, the teacher's focus is on the specific moves—turn or jumps. Classes become repetitions of the dance for the remainder of the year.

This primary focus on perfecting the routine creates several problems for students in their artistic development. First, because the dancers spend an entire year rehearsing a single dance, they do not develop the ability to quickly pick up nuanced and character-driven details in choreography. This can result in generalities of movement, and will later harm them in their career when this skill is required for an audition.

A second issue is work ethic and work habits. Students in competitive studios know that they are going to rehearse the dance each week, so they do not work outside of class. Crandall counters this by expecting dancers to work outside of rehearsal as well as when they are waiting for their time to be onstage. A third issue is this: because many competitive dances are group numbers where all the dancers move in unison, better dancers are often placed front and center to give a better overall impression. Lesser dancers will therefore always have someone more skilled to follow, which reduces their need to fully learn choreography. The tendency to "follow" may also create behavior that is robotic or thoughtless. To counter this, Crandall treats group pieces as solos and requires all dancers to perform the choreography on their own, thus revealing deficiencies in execution or understanding. Finally, the last and perhaps most important issue for the purposes of this article, is that dancers often do not really know what they are trying to express with their movement. Influenced in part by SYTYCD, dancers mostly want to impress with tricks and very athletic movement. Unfortunately, many young dancers have not learned how to translate the idea of the dance into the body and then express the story and the character's objective through movement.

Many of the above problems can be fixed with careful guidance, but there is a larger issue facing our young choreographers, who begin their lives as dancers influenced by the aforementioned dance-travaganzas, competitions, and reality TV. Increasingly for them, at this stage in their development, the music and lyrics often drive the movement. Student choreographers have difficulty creating movement

that is in contrast to the music. You can see this in SYTYCD, where a "sad" song elicits "sad" movement. As a result, they create movement that is parallel to the rhythm and intensity of the music. Therefore, the expressive and emotional content resides in the music, causing the dancers to follow the music's rhythms rather than to lead with a strong dramatic purpose. The movement lacks depth. As so beautifully expressed by Crandall in an interview: "Music is the sister art that cradles the movement. When there is nothing in the movement, the music covers the movement and the dance becomes accompaniment." Implicit in Crandall's comment is the danger of dance losing

## WE MUST HELP DANCERS BECOME ACTORS AND CHOREOGRAPHERS (WHO FREQUENTLY BEGIN THEIR CAREER AS DANCERS) BECOME PLAYWRIGHTS.

its communicative power. In many contemporary dances, if the music is taken away the dance cannot stand on its own. Young choreographers may be obsessed with an image of the movement as opposed to connecting with the inner impulses and sequences of the movement as language or as a communicative tool, techniques which are so vital for creating musical theatre dance.

Even though families and friends may applaud the extensions and multiple pirouettes of the students, these skills do not automatically translate to a career in musical theatre performance. The critical response was not favorable for *Burn the Floor's* choreographer, Jason Gilkison. Critic Michael Dale, reviewing for *Broadway World*, said:

[I]t's Gilkison's choreography, relentless in its determination to heat up the night with splits, tight clinches, gyrations and hip-swaying that quickly turns the evening into a dull affair. His staging of group numbers—and the show is dominated by group numbers—lacks texture. Routines tend to stay on the same level of aggressive athleticism serving more as skill demonstrations than expressions of artistry.

Critic David Rooney of *Variety*, agreed:

[I]f you're going to invade the turf of Bob Fosse, Jerome Robbins and Michael Bennett, you need to bring something beyond adrenaline and aggressive sizzle. Something like grace, style or wit. While there's only about 15 ounces of collective body fat onstage, there's also about 15 ounces of imagination.

Like *Cirque Du Soleil's* 2017 production of *Paramour*, the producers of *Burn the Floor* opened in a Broadway house and invited Broadway theatre critics to review, thus signaling their desire to be regarded as legitimate theatre and not just "dancesport" or circus. But as critics noted, an over-dependence on tricks does not equate to—or replace—storytelling.

## PLAYWRIGHT CHOREOGRAPHERS

Music theatre historian and critic Mark Grant identifies both de Mille and Robbins as "playwriting choreographers" whose work enhanced the book, rather than the production values. De Mille, according to Grant, is "the person singularly responsible for elevating the role of choreographer in a musical to an authorial level" (260). She understood the need for dancers to embrace the art of the actor, and even offered acting classes. Her onetime dance partner Joseph Anthony said: "She was interested in much more than just the steps; they were a means of revealing the person's character and the quality of their life" (qtd. in Grant 264).

Like de Mille, Jerome Robbins understood the importance of acting. He studied at the Actors Studio. As a director/choreographer, Robbins demanded that each actor support the words, song, and movements with the appropriate subtext of emotion. Like de Mille and her dream ballet in *Oklahoma!*, Robbins understood the power of movement and dance to express what words alone cannot. The brilliance of Robbins' work as a playwriting choreographer is revealed in his "Small House of Uncle Thomas" in *The King and I*. Hammerstein's original conception was to have a play-within-a-play, much like the dumb show in *Hamlet*. According to Grant, Robbins stepped into the role of playwright choreographer, transforming Hammerstein's original idea of a production number into "an ethnologically authentic dance that, through understated Asiatic gestures, paradoxically heightened the emotion" (273).

Kathleen Marshall stated that she seldom puts triple pirouettes in her auditions because she is really looking for a "brightness" in the dancer:

I look for dancers who are vivid, dancers who are present. Of course, I want strong technique; that goes without saying. But I think many dancers that have strong technique don't focus on anything else. You want people who are alive, bright-eyed, focused, and energized. I think dancers must be able to adapt to style very fast. I think many times there are dancers who can kick their leg





quite high, they can execute triple turns, and leap and jump, but they can't absorb that style you're looking for. And I think that's a very unique talent. (qtd. in Cramer 130)

Many of our current students grew up singing songs and dancing dances from *Wicked*, Disney musicals, and *Matilda*. The spectacle of these shows induces an excitement that is palpable to the audience and also calculated by the producers. For example, when little girls dressed in princess costumes go to a performance of *Beauty and the Beast*, roses are sold in the theater lobby. Even *Burn The Floor* sells dancewear, DVDs, and accessories. We need to readjust our students' expectation of what constitutes "magic" in the theatre. Is it just glitter? Or is it the emotional heart of the narrative?

Our second challenge is that we must help dancers become actors and choreographers (who frequently begin their career as dancers) become playwrights. In the text *Thinking Like a Director*, Michael Bloom introduces a list of key questions for approaching a play: e.g., "What is the story being told? What is the central conflict? What is the present-day significance of the play? Why do you want to direct it?" (80). These questions can be translated to dance and choreography: What is the story being told? What is the idea being expressed? What is the conflict, or tension? What is the release? What does this dance mean to us now? Why do you want to choreograph it? Even if a dance is intended for pure entertainment one must ask, what is the progression of ideas, rhythms, phrases, and shapes? And finally, what do you want to communicate? By embracing and valuing

the contributions of playwright choreographers such as de Mille, Robbins, Marshall, Hoggett, and Jones, we can show students what is possible in musical theatre dance.

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# BRIAN YORKEY:

## *on the craft of writing for the musical theatre*

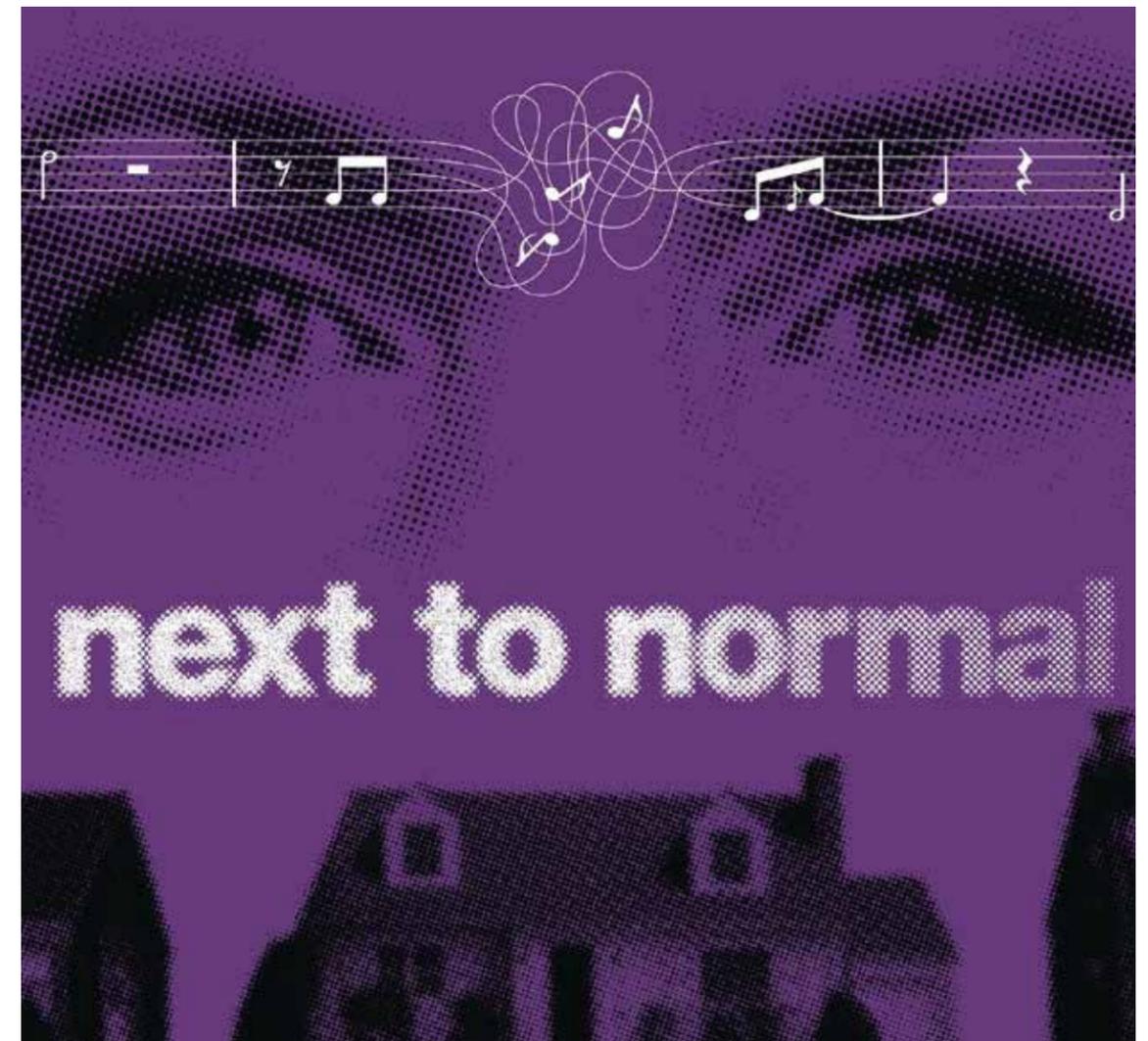
Interview by Joe Deer

Brian Yorkey has won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama and Tony Awards for Best Book of a Musical and Best Original Score for a Musical for *Next To Normal*. He was also nominated for the Tony for Best Original Score for a Musical for *If/Then*. Yorkey is also a prolific writer for television and film, including his recent series for Netflix, *13 Reasons Why*. In 2011, during the Broadway run of *Next To Normal*, Yorkey spoke with Joe Deer about his development as a writer and director.

**JOE DEER:** I know you grew up in Issaquah, Washington. Were you involved with theatre in high school?

**BRIAN YORKEY:** I was very involved with theatre in high school. There were four shows a year that you could be involved with and I was involved with all except maybe two in the four years I was in high school. Actually, and I'm very proud of this, I won the drama medal as a graduating senior from my high school. So that was one of the proudest moments of my life.

**JD:** Were there any projects or experiences that you had at that time that made a big impact on you and helped you in some way in the direction you've gone?



**BY:** Yeah, there were a few. The first was I actually had never been in a musical before. And I'm not a tremendously good singer. I can get by if I have to. But, because I was male and loud, I was much in demand for the musicals. So, I was able to play Luther Billis in *South Pacific* and I got to do Ali Hakim in *Oklahoma!* and just some really amazing and quite fun parts. And I got to be in musicals for the first time in my life and began to understand their special power and the special sort of pleasure that comes from a really good musical. And I think that was the beginning of my love affair with musicals and what they could do and how they can win over an audience.

Another thing that my high school had, which was great, was the "Freshmen/Sophomore One-Acts," which were plays acted by freshmen and sophomores and directed by seniors. Being in those was a big part of my experience when I was an underclassman. And then, as a Senior, I read a bunch of one-acts trying to find a play that I wanted to direct and I couldn't find one, so I wrote one. And that was a breakthrough for me because I wrote out of necessity. I thought, "Well, you know,

what the hell. How hard could it be?" I wish I still had that naïve way, honestly! You know, the more you know, the harder it gets. But that was the first time in my life where I realized, "Well, I can just write this and people will act it and people will watch and be occasionally entertained." And that was an amazing moment for me.

**JD: Had you written or directed before that?**

**BY:** I had. (laughs) When I was in the fourth grade I had a really encouraging fourth grade teacher. Her name was Ms. Rathlind. She was incredibly willing to go with whatever creative impulse her students had, and I would get together with my friends and we would write little mystery plays that were basically ripping off the *Encyclopedia Brown* books. I don't know if you know those books or not.

**JD: Yes, sure. My son is in fifth grade.**

**BY:** Well those were some of my favorite books because of the short little mystery that you could solve if you paid close enough attention. So we would write little mystery plays and rehearse them over recess and then perform them for our fourth grade class and get people to solve the mystery. So that was my very first experience with quote, unquote, writing plays. It was really more just being an organizer and bossing people around. As you know, as we grow older those are actually useful skills.

**JD: So, at that time, who were your artistic heroes? When you were high school, who did you admire? Or was there any work you particularly admired?**

**BY:** When I was, I think, a sophomore in high school, I discovered the cast recording of *Sunday in the Park with George* and it just blew my mind. And that was the same summer that I performed in *Godspell* in a summer program at Village Theatre (in Issaquah, Washington). So, for most of my high school career, my twin musical heroes were Stephen Sondheim and Stephen Schwartz. And I've since had the opportunity to meet both of them and of course was completely tongue-tied. I know Stephen Schwartz a little bit better now and I'm able actually to carry on a conversation with him. But, in both cases, when I first met each of those men there was no way to put into words what their music and what their shows had meant to me when I was in high school. And I also around that time saw a production of *True West* in Seattle. I started to read Sam Shepard. So, I would say he was probably the third of the big, sort of mind-blowing heroes of my high school days.

**JD: That's a great blend. And I think you can see evidence of all of that in a way in the stuff you've written since then.**

**BY:** That's great to hear. Maybe not surprising because I tend to rip off the very best.

FOR MOST OF MY HIGH SCHOOL CAREER,  
MY TWIN MUSICAL HEROES WERE  
STEPHEN SONDHEIM AND STEPHEN  
SCHWARTZ.

**JD: So you currently split your time, maybe less than you used to, between New York City and Issaquah, Washington at the Village Theatre. You started something called KidStage at the Village Theatre. What is that?**

**BY:** Well, Robb Hunt (co-founder of Village Theatre in 1979, and current Executive Producer) and I started it together. It was his brainstorm. The idea was that Village Theatre had a long tradition of summer stock programs involving kids doing shows. Rob's idea was that kids learn best when they have the ultimate responsibility. Rather than a bunch of adults bossing kids around and directing them, the idea was that the kids would do everything: directing, acting, technical, marketing. Adults would be on hand to help and provide resources and make sure no one got hurt.

But, for the most part, the responsibility in every department lay with the kids doing the show. And that was a remarkable thing, and scary. But, I credit that program and having that responsibility with really, I think, preparing me to do this for a living. Because there was an opening date, there were tickets being sold, and the fact was, if we 15, 16, 17, and 18-year olds didn't pull it together and make it happen, no one else was going to do it for us. And that was an incredibly valuable thing to learn, as well as an empowering thing for a teenager, to have that kind of trust put in you.

*(Note: Yorkey was still a teen in the mid-1980s when he became involved, first as an actor, then as a writer and director at KidStage at Village Theatre.)*

And that program has since blossomed. There are also classes; there are all sorts of productions year-round. It's actually kind of an amazing program. But, it's all predicated on this idea that you really learn theatre by doing it and being responsible for making it happen yourself.

**JD: Do you still work with young theatre artists?**

**BY:** I do whenever I can. I was the associate artistic director of the Village from 2000 thru 2007 and each year I worked on a KidStage program there called the Company Program. It's a lot like what David Spangler does with Lovewell.

*(Note: Lovewell Institute brings young artists together to create collaborative musical theatre in a deliberate process.)*

It was a group of teenagers who created their own show through improv and writing exercises, with the composer. It was really an amazing, amazing program. Teenagers were able to not only do all the various aspects of theatre that they wanted to explore, but were also able to explore stories and themes that were important to them and to their lives, which is rare, I think.

**JD: I think so, too. That brings me to *Next To Normal*, which has two teenage characters in it: Natalie and Henry. At least in the press releases, Natalie is described as trying to be perfect and her boyfriend Henry is a musician, slacker, and stoner. And I will tell you as a teacher of people who are leaving their teens or are still in their teens when I get them, *Next to Normal* and those characters resonate so powerfully with people at that age. Where did you arrive at your ideas for how to sort of define those characters?**

**BY:** That's a great question. I do a lot of writing for movies, and I end up writing on movies with teenage characters quite a bit, and two things have helped me. One is the Company program that I mentioned earlier. So, I actually know a lot of teenagers or recent teenagers. So, it's not just a matter of having to be a guy in his thirties trying to remember what it was like. (Although I do sort of vividly remember what it was like and I think a lot of us do.) But, I also do actually know a lot of teenagers. And certainly working in Hollywood and also sometimes on Broadway, you meet a lot of people who write teenage characters or direct teenage characters who don't really have much of an idea of what teenagers are like—and so that's number one. We're also very lucky with *Next to Normal* because Michael Greif has two kids who are teenagers. So, he was also very sensitive, too, and aware of the way teenagers really are and what their concerns are and how they navigate the world. So, that was part of it. And lastly, I just always try to be as truthful as I can about the way teenagers see the world, which I think is, at once, much more expansive and, in some ways, much more narrow than adults tend to realize. Teenagers are a lot smarter, and certainly a lot more emotionally aware than I think adults tend to remember. And, at the same time, they don't have the breadth of experience always to put those feelings and perceptions into context.

**JD: Because it's always the first time.**

**BY:** It's a very combustible combination if that makes sense.

**JD: It totally does. I spent last evening at our local high school football game because my ten-year-old son wanted to go. And there's nothing like going to that to see the entire sort of panoply of human experience played out before your very eyes.**

**BY:** Absolutely. There are two actually, and I don't know if this is interesting or not, but two very specific things happened that were incredibly helpful. We worked with James Lapine for a while on developing the script. James is, I think, one of the most brilliant writers of theatre I've ever met. And at that time we only had the character of Natalie and she was a slightly different character and James Lapine said to both Tom (Kitt) and I, "Who are you in this play? What character is you?" And we gave the standard sort of answer, "Well, they're all a facet of us and blah blah blah." And he said, "No I think you're Natalie. I think you're both Natalie and

TEENAGERS ARE A LOT SMARTER,  
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I think that there's more of her story to tell than we're telling." And we looked at each other and said, "Wow. That's actually kind of true." That was a breakthrough for us to realize that there was part of that story that we weren't telling because we hadn't recognized that who Natalie was, was really in some ways who we were in our families. The second thing James Lapine said to us was that he said that I think Natalie needs someone on the outside—a friend—someone who can reflect a different possibility to her. Reflect a world that is not the world of her house and her family. I immediately thought of who would be the most unlikely and yet most suitable boyfriend for Natalie. And that brought me to Henry.

**JD: Have you gotten a lot of response from teenagers about those characters?**

**BY:** Absolutely. We did this thing last year, basically, we call it a Twitter performance of the play. Which is we actually sort of tweeted the whole play, the whole show from the point of view from each of the characters. And people would respond and retweet and write feedback and actually, sort of, talk back to the characters as

if they were real people, because they were tweeting as if they were real people.

**JD: Were the actors on their phones Tweeting?**

**BY:** I was tweeting as all of the characters. We had an interactive ad agency that ran the campaign. They helped me turn the play into, I think, six weeks of tweets. You know, one day per scene. We had a tremendous number of teenagers respond to Natalie and Henry and really showed a very deep involvement in their story and very strong opinions about the way they should treat each other and what should happen. At a later part of that, we asked all of our followers on Twitter what they thought would happen next for Natalie and Henry, whether they would stay together and for how long. And we got all sorts of responses all along the spectrum. People felt very strongly about Natalie and Henry.

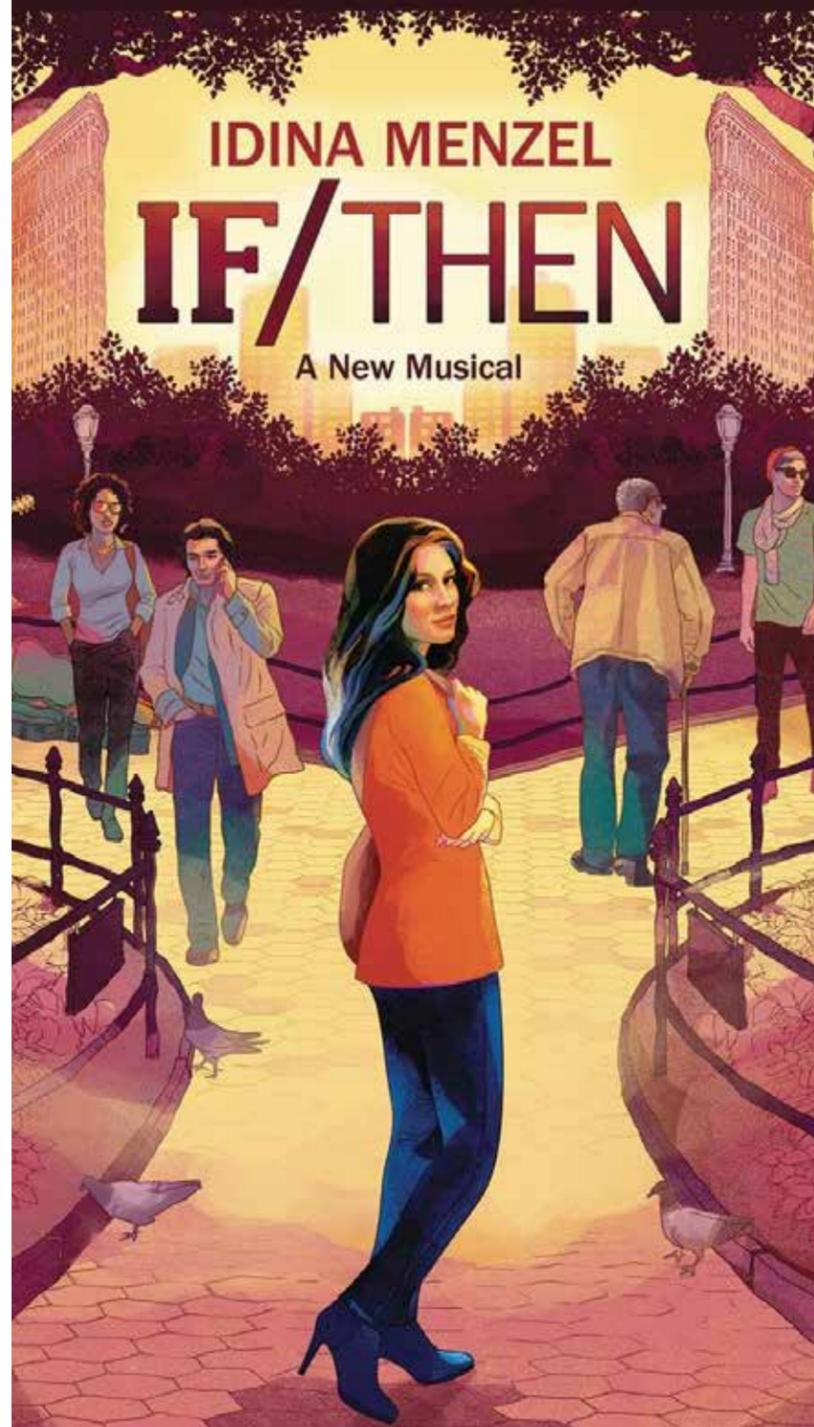
I had a funny, sweet encounter at the stage door last month on Alice Ripley's last night. Tom and I went out and said hi to a lot of people who were waiting, and one young woman—if she wasn't a teenager she was only very recently out of her teens—told me that I had ruined her love life. And I said, "Uh-oh, how have I ruined your love life?" And she said, "Well I keep waiting to meet someone like Henry, and I haven't yet." So I said, "I'm sorry about that. But, for what it's worth, I'm waiting to meet someone like Henry, too, and I haven't yet."

**JD: So you've become Jane Austin for a new generation.**

**BY:** Exactly!

**JD: Do you have any advice for young writers, for those people who are interested in writing?**

**BY:** Sure. You know I think the first piece of advice that I would give is "just write." I think the hardest part of writing is actually sitting down and writing. And if you're interested in writing, don't worry about whether it's going to be any good at first. Don't worry that it seems like you're imitating your favorite writer, because that's a natural thing to do, we all do it. And don't worry what anyone else says about



your writing, or about the idea of your writing. Just sit down and write and see where it goes. I mean, that to me is still the hardest part of writing: sitting down writing. And if you're involved in theatre and you want to write for theatre, the great thing is your friends will, you know, actors will take any opportunity to act. Actors love to act. And they can't really sit at home and act the way a writer can sit at home and write. But, if you write something and you want to hear what it sounds like and you want to get your play brought to life, it's really easy to invite a bunch of friends over and assign them the parts, and you can hear your play. And that will change your writing. You'll learn so much, and you'll go back and write more. It's actually a challenge. But, it's not something you should be afraid of.

**JD: You're also a director. How does your work as a writer influence your work as a director or vice versa?**

**BY:** That's a great question. I love working with actors. I love directing actors. And directing actors and helping them realize their truth in performance and realize their actions has taught me an awful lot of what actors need from a scene, from a stage direction, from a script, a story, a play. And that, I think, has made my writing better. I think there are too many writers for theatre who don't have any kind of understanding about what an actor needs and what an actor goes through (and also what an actor doesn't need). When I started out as a writer, I wrote voluminous stage directions. And as a director, I mostly ignore stage directions unless I'm really, really lost. And I learned that you only need the bare essential sort of outline, because you can't, as a writer, give anything whole hog to a director or an actor. You have to show them the way. But, if it's going to be realized in any truthful way, they have to find it themselves. And I think that directing has taught me that. And, certainly, I think writing has influenced my direction because I directed before I wrote. And my approach was much more general. And when you write, you take such care with every line, every phrase,

every piece of punctuation—much less every beat in every scene—that you really want someone to take as much care as you did. And I think that definitely has informed my direction. I work at a much greater level of detail and specificity as a director than I did before I became a writer.

**JD: What did you learn from Michael Greif about directing?**

**BY:** That could take up a whole issue! Michael Greif is a brilliant director, and I know that is a superlative word. But, I think in this case it really replies. I learned a tremendous amount from him. I'll pick a few things to share. I learned first and foremost from him that you must have tremendous passion for the project. As a writer, you always dream that someone is going to care about your show as much as you do. And Michael Greif cares as much, or more. And it was truly inspiring, and also galvanizing, because he was so passionate and involved in, as I said before, every line, every moment. You know, if there was a line that I just sort of tossed off, he would find it and ask me about it. And he would say, "What does this mean?" And I would say, "You know, I don't know what it means. I was hoping no one would ask me that." And then I would have to go away and rewrite it. He was always incredibly kind and incredibly generous. But very, very focused. And it made my writing so much better, I can't even begin to tell you.

Another thing I've learned from Michael, which I think is helpful in directing—it's helpful in writing, it's helpful in everything in theatre and probably in life, too—is that he does not give up and say "That's good enough." He gives so many notes, and I think at some point actors tend to joke about it, because he is so diligent. But, he does not give up until something's where it should be. I think so many of us in theatre, it's easy to get tired, it's easy to feel like we're running out of time, it's easy to be scattered and just let things go. And he keeps working until the very, very last minute and beyond. I'll stop and see the show at the Booth Theatre maybe once every couple of weeks. And, literally, almost every time I stop by, he's there taking notes, seeing if there are things that have slipped, if there are things that need to be adjusted, or if there are things that he has thought of that he hasn't thought of before. It's amazing to me. Not only is he so smart and so passionate, but he works so hard and doesn't let things go, doesn't let things slide. And that has been inspiring and it's been a real high bar to live up to.

**JD: Wonderful. Thank you, Brian.**

*Special thanks to Blaine Boyd for transcription assistance. Content has been edited for publication.*





# TO SPEAK IS TO FLY

**Forrest McClendon**  
Keynote Speaker

**Musical Theatre Educators Alliance  
Conference**  
January 6, 2017  
NYU

## I.

I was on my way to Canada to teach a master class for the Young Canadians of the Calgary Stampede when I got the first call about *The Scottsboro Boys* from a close friend in Philadelphia.

And I was supposed to be teaching private lessons at Temple University the morning of my audition for *The Scottsboro Boys*. I rescheduled for the afternoon and expected to be back in time, but I had to text my students to say that Susan Stroman was “keeping me”—and she has kept me ever since.

From the Vineyard to the Guthrie to Broadway and eventually London, alongside my hero, mentor, friend and brother Colman Domingo—my dreams came true many times over.

I had a student ask me about that in a master class once: “What is it like when all of your dreams have come true?”

“You begin to live in the realm of the unimaginable,” I replied.

Colman’s friend, Milissa Carey, invited me to speak to her students at the University of London whilst we were performing *The Scottsboro Boys* in London. She said, “I can’t pay you, but I can buy you a hamburger.” The next day, she gifted me a theatre textbook with a photo of me as Samuel Leibowitz—my name right there.

## II.

Unimaginable. Like being here today.

I was recently back in London for Christmas and went to see *Peter Pan* at the National Theatre on Boxing Day, the day after Christmas. I turned my phone on at the 20-minute interval for a quick Instagram post, and I received a text from my friend Charlie Gilbert asking me to speak at this MTEA conference here at NYU. I texted an immediate ‘yes’ and turned my phone off to settle in for the second half.

But I couldn’t get Peter’s line from the first act out of my head: “*To fly, you must think the loveliest thoughts.*”

Within the hour, I was in tears, as Wendy Darling delivered the takeaway line: “*It’s not too late. Take these wings and fly.*” It was the power of musical theatre at its best, reminding me that I believe in the impact of theatre and the importance of training future theater-makers.

To speak is to fly and I’m here to share how our work has given me the opportunity and the responsibility to speak.

## III.

It was a great privilege to be a part of the premiere of THE SCOTTSBORO BOYS at the Vineyard Theatre with Brandon Victor Dixon. Brandon who recently set off a firestorm within the community—across the nation and, in my mind, around the world—when he spoke to VP-elect Mike Pence from the stage following a performance of *Hamilton*.

I immediately posted my support for Brandon and all of the artists on Facebook, but

little did I know it would put me at war with an old friend from community theatre back when I was in high school. He was Harold Hill and I was “Shipooopi” pretty much. Anyway...

## IV.

For anyone who might have missed it, these were Brandon’s exact words in a statement that was written “by the show’s creator, Lin-Manuel Miranda; its director, Thomas Kail; and the lead producer, Jeffrey Seller; with input from cast members,” according to Mr. Seller.

“We, sir—we—are the diverse America who are alarmed and anxious that your new administration will not protect us, our planet, our children, our parents, or defend us and uphold our inalienable rights. We truly hope that this show has inspired you to uphold our American values and to work on behalf of all of us.”

My friend took exception to my FB post and left a nasty comment attacking Brandon as a second-rate actor, which I promptly deleted before writing a private message to him:

“I deleted your comment because I don’t share things in order to debate. I’m happy to hear anything you have to say privately. For my part, friend, I am clear that art changes lives/laws. I lived that for the past 5 years on both Broadway and the West End and throughout the country as I shared the Scottsboro story, made speeches and ignited change. I’m not an entertainer. I am an educator. And the stage is my chosen platform. Given the opportunity to speak, I will always choose to do so. This isn’t about Hillary for me. It is about the simple fact that the theatre is my chosen platform for this very reason. I work globally as part of the conversation about race, class and gender—the theatre is my medium for my message which is education. I appreciate your position. But I’m not a back and forth guy. That’s for politicians and pundits. Always, yours, Fxxx”

To which he replied:

“Well the fact that you are not open to debate in a public forum just proves my point about progressives. You just want to stick with your view and like your buddy, lecture the rest of us, because you know best. And I too am an “oppressed” person being gay, the difference being I just don’t feel that I need to lecture the world about it.

It’s funny how your friend didn’t give Pence an opportunity to go “back and forth” either. LOL

Your and your buddy's attitude is why your elitist candidate lost the election, my friend. Check your ego."

I clarified:

"I don't consider my page an open forum. But here's the point: I don't care about who lost or won the election as you seem to care deeply. My concern as an oppressed person is that I still have to fight either way because of the things you said about Hillary! And for me theatre is the front lines of the fight. I make speeches is what I'm telling you. I don't have to battle you or anyone else in any

## I WORK GLOBALLY AS PART OF THE CONVERSATION ABOUT RACE, CLASS AND GENDER—THE THEATRE IS MY MEDIUM FOR MY MESSAGE.

forum because I work on the front lines. I make art and speeches. That's where you will find me, ego totally in check, making all of them change oppressive behavior, Hillary or anyone else."

To which he responded:

"We should all fight for each other. But I think we will have to disagree on the *Hamilton* speech. The play is the thing. It spoke for itself. Pence didn't need a lecture especially being there with his family. Invite him backstage. Take him to Sardis. Be humble. Give the guy a chance. As a former actor, I wouldn't even dream of doing that to a VP elect or otherwise. I come from a different generation of thinking. There is a time and place for everything. Awards shows - all bets are off. But right now we have to speak with, not talk at each other. I have family members not speaking with me because I voted for Trump. Our president, in my opinion, could be doing a much better job bringing the country [together] now especially during the holidays. If Lincoln could do [it] in 1863, surely it could be done now, right?"

Anyway, thanks for listening. There is a lot happening in the world I don't like today coming from all sides. Maybe 2017 will be better.

Happy Holiday!"

Tough conversation. Teachable moment. Unimaginable life during unimaginable times.

## V.

But the reason for the statement from the artists and creative team at *Hamilton* is the real teachable moment in my mind.

The lead producer of *Hamilton*, Jeffrey Seller, told the New York Times: "Our cast could barely go on stage the day after the election. The election was painful and crushing to all of us here. We had to ask ourselves, how do we cope with this?"

That's exactly what I experienced with my students when I walked into the Dina Merrill Theatre at the O'Neill that week—fifty devastated and petrified future theater-makers searching for a way forward.

## VI.

First, I spoke to them about a dangerous pattern that I noticed during the election season: the number of people who "unfriended" those they disagreed with and how our greatest asset in the theatre is dialogue, robust dialogue.

Second, I spoke to them about the greatest skill that being an actor has given me: listening, onstage and off. I told them about my friend from *The Music Man* and how the job of acting is to 'shut the hell up while you say your line'. But that when I'm doing this acting thing well, I must allow myself to be "changed by your line," as Olympia Dukakis told me in a workshop last year. To listen with the intention of being changed. That's the power of theatre.

Last, I spoke to them about that moment when we announced to a sold out house in London that the last of the Scottsboro 'boys' had been posthumously pardoned, 80 years later: "Is it too late?" I was asked by a reporter at the BBC.

"It is never too late to admit you were wrong," I said. And that's how the healing can begin.

As Wendy Darling said, "It's not too late. Take these wings and fly."

To everyone here, ALL of you soldiers on the frontlines helping new recruits to find a way forward during difficult times, thank you.

# BOOK REVIEW

by Matthew Teague Miller

## **ACTING IN MUSICAL THEATRE; A COMPREHENSIVE COURSE SECOND EDITION by Joe Deer and Rocco Dal Vera. Routledge, 2016; pp. 396. \$149.00 hardback, \$58.95 paperback, \$53.06 eBook.**

*Acting in Musical Theatre; A Comprehensive Course* is exceptional in its conception, execution and its 2016 revision for the second edition. With this textbook, Joe Deer and Rocco Dal Vera have created an essential guide to musical theatre acting, breaking down basic Stanislavski principals and applying them directly to performance, analyzing music theory and style through a musical theatre lens, and even introducing professional business practices and audition techniques.

Author Joe Deer is Head of Musical Theatre at Wright State University and brings a wealth of professional experience in a variety of capacities, including being a Resident Artist of The Human Race Theatre Company in Dayton, Ohio. Deer is also a former president and co-founder of the Musical Theatre Educator's Alliance. Co-author Rocco Dal Vera was a Professor of Drama and former Head of the Division for Musical Theatre, Acting, Opera, Dance, Arts Administration, Theatre Design and Production at University of Cincinnati's College-Conservatory of Music. Rocco Dal Vera passed away in September 2017.

*Acting in Musical Theatre* is structured as a complete course, allowing professors to guide students through a course of study sequentially or pick-and-choose the sections relevant to their needs. Additionally, the book can serve as a self-guided tour through Musical Theatre study for those who wish to learn outside of

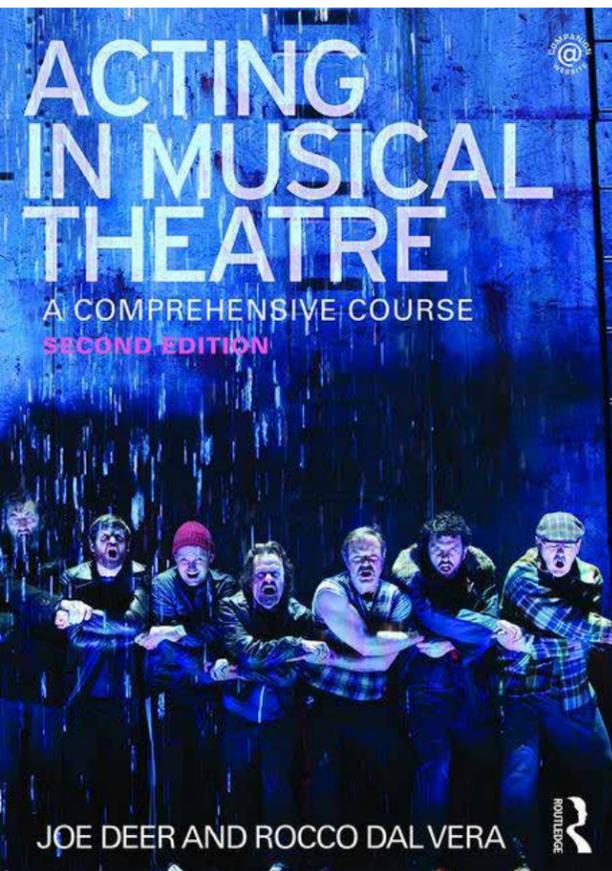
the classroom or laboratory. With assignments embedded throughout the text, the book can become as intense or as comfortable as the reader desires, depending upon their goals and drive.

The book contains six sections: 1) Fundamentals of Acting in Musical Theatre, 2) Score and Libretto Analysis and Structure, 3) The Journey of the Song, 4) Making it a Performance, 5) Style in Musical Theatre and 6) The Profession. The book engages the reader by using song lyrics ranging from musicals like *Les Misérables* and *Children of Eden* to *American Idiot* and *Next to Normal*.

Perhaps the most valuable component is Section 3, The Journey of the Song. In this portion the authors take musical theatre acting to the next level by combining sections 1 and 2, diving deep into the process of acting a song. Well-defined breakdowns of the four different types of song journeys, examples of lyric sheet templates and the musical "clues" that can help inform the actor of tactical and beat changes, and illustrations of how to use relationships to fuel a character's motivation to sing a particular section or phrase, equip the musical theatre actor with tools to tackle any song.

The revised edition includes new digital content including a website and PowerPoint lecture slides to complement the learning experience. The book also contains new style overviews, and an expanded Section 6, The Profession.

*Acting in Musical Theatre; A Comprehensive Course (Second Edition)*, is a comprehensive textbook. This book should be a staple on the shelf of every musical theatre professor, instructor, and student as it is an invaluable resource.



## 3 BOOK REVIEWS

by David Coolidge

The 2017 MTEA conference in New York City explored the ongoing conversation regarding the place and importance of “New Works” in academia. The panel discussion, “Ars Nova and the Future of the Musical Theater” featuring Dave Malloy (composer and lyricist of *Natasha, Pierre and the Great Comet of 1812*) and Emily Shooltz (associate artistic director of Ars Nova), highlighted the importance of new-work development and the growing trend of the multi-dimensional artist in today’s industry. In similar fashion, Maggie Gilroy’s article *Musical Theatre Students Are Becoming Quadruple Threats* in *American Theatre Magazine*, January 2017, noted that many academic institutions are responding to students’ interest in new works by adding musical theatre writing courses to their curriculums.

The last five years have seen the publication of three new books that address the topic of writing for the musical theatre. Each would be suitable as a textbook in its own way. Julian Woolford’s *How Musicals Work: And How To Write Your Own* is a step-by-step “how to” book complete with writing exercises to generate new ideas. Steve Cuden’s time spent in Hollywood colors his approach to the craft in *Beating Broadway: How to Create Stories for Musicals That Get Standing Ovations*. And Jack Viertel’s tour de force, *The Secret Life of the American Musical: How Broadway Shows Are Built*, is a page-turning architectural look at the structure of the American musical theatre from its inception to present day, that explores not only what works, but why it works.

### **HOW MUSICALS WORK: AND HOW TO WRITE YOUR OWN by Julian Woolford. Nick Hern Books, 2012; pp. 320. \$18.95 paperback.**

While there is no sure way to write a successful piece of musical theatre, Julian Woolford’s *How Musicals Work: And How To Write Your Own* is a sound first step. The book offers plenty of examples throughout, and there are exercises the reader can use as a springboard for crafting new original work. In this way, *How Musicals Work* is a veritable workshop or university course in the palm of your hand.

Julian Woolford is an accomplished writer and trained in the art of directing at the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School. His directing experience spans productions in the West End, off-Broadway, and worldwide. Woolford’s musical writing won

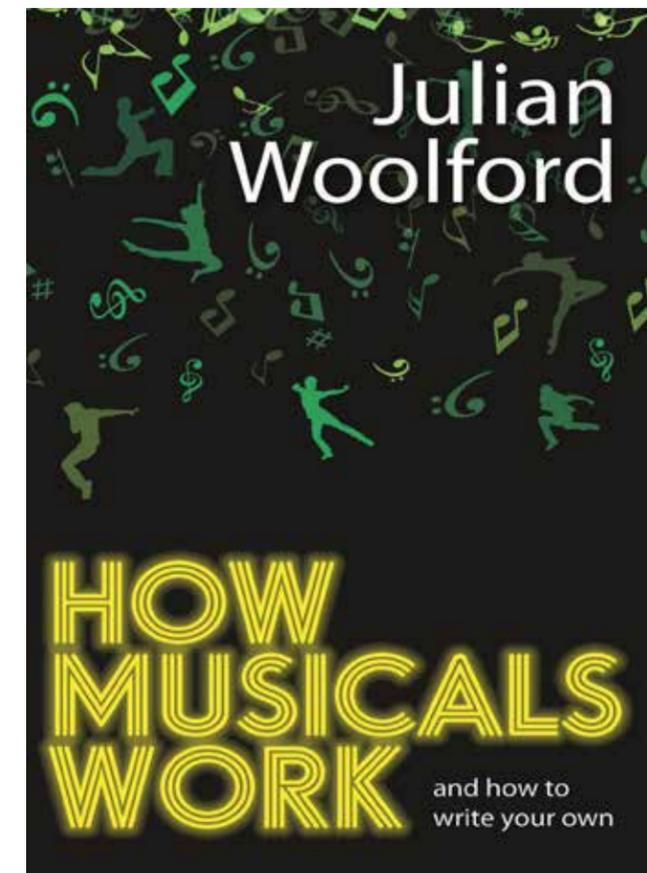
the Covent Garden Festival Search for a New Musical, and for BBC Radio 3 he penned Broadway Hall of Fame: Cole Porter and Broadway Hall of Fame: Leonard Bernstein. Woolford speaks with authority on the form and structure of successful musicals, no doubt his thoughts having been shaped from his experiences directing National Tours of such classic shows as *Fiddler on the Roof*, *South Pacific*, and *Carousel*. His expansive knowledge of the genre as a whole and his specificity of effective form and structure reverberate across the pages of *How Musicals Work*, singing to the reader and prompting a song of their own.

*How Musicals Work* is divided into fourteen chapters. Each chapter breaks down a topic, such as Forms of Musicals; Source Material; Structure; Characters and Scenes; Songs; Lyrical Matters; and Rewrites and Workshops. Readers will come away from the text with a better understanding of how to: accurately break down a musical into Woolford’s Twelve Stages of Structure, categorize character by archetype, and identify song structure in ABC format.

In chapter four “Foundations,” Woolford takes a musical theatre centric approach to storytelling by exploring Aristotle’s Elements of Drama, Lehman Engel’s Elements of a Musical, and Woolford’s own “Elements of Producibility.” In triplicate, Woolford uses this collection of elements as a “Periodic Table for Musical Theatre” to aid the reader in forming a “solid conception of the show you want to write.”

One of the distinguishing factors of *How Musicals Work* is Woolford’s focus on the fundamentals of music as well as storytelling. Chapters ten “Lyrical Matters” and eleven “Musical Matters” discuss: rhyme scheme, scansion, text setting, chord structures, time signatures, and orchestrations. While Woolford is clear that the primary function of this text is not concerned with “the intricacies of songwriting,” his acknowledgement of the importance of such matters is crucial to the development of successful musical collaborations and often overlooked in similar texts.

For those looking to embark upon the journey of writing a musical or teaching the craft, Julian Woolford’s *How Musicals Work: And How To Write Your Own* is a



worthy addition to your reading list, and may well be used as a primary text. The book references well known musicals such as *The Sound of Music*, *West Side Story*, *Gypsy*, and *Evita* as well as contemporary works like *Wicked*, *Avenue Q*, *Spring Awakening*, and *Spiderman: Turn off the Dark*.

A guiding force in *How Musicals Work* is the notion that you can't know where you're going until you know where you've been. In the opening pages, Woolford writes, "You cannot create great art until you understand how that art has been created in the past, even if you then work in your own idiosyncratic manner." With this in mind, Woolford has carefully crafted a user-friendly, step-by-step manual to not only understand why certain musicals are upheld by the masses, withstanding the test of time, but also how one might begin crafting a story of their own.

**BEATING BROADWAY:  
HOW TO CREATE STORIES  
FOR MUSICALS THAT GET  
STANDING OVATIONS by Steve  
Cuden. Cudwerks Productions,  
2013; pp. 466. \$19.95  
paperback.**

*Beating Broadway's* greatest strength lies in its ability to hold steadfast to the basic tenets of storytelling while acknowledging the many ways that popular entertainment has influenced the evolution of Broadway musicals. Throughout the book, Cuden's Hollywood background is apparent. He encourages the use of well established screenwriting basics for your musical, including developing a logline, writing a beat outline or treatment, and erring on the side of action rather than dialogue. Section one of the book covers elements of story construction for musicals, and section two includes a narrative beat analysis for forty musicals (Broadway and film). Each chapter concludes with a helpful summary of key takeaways.

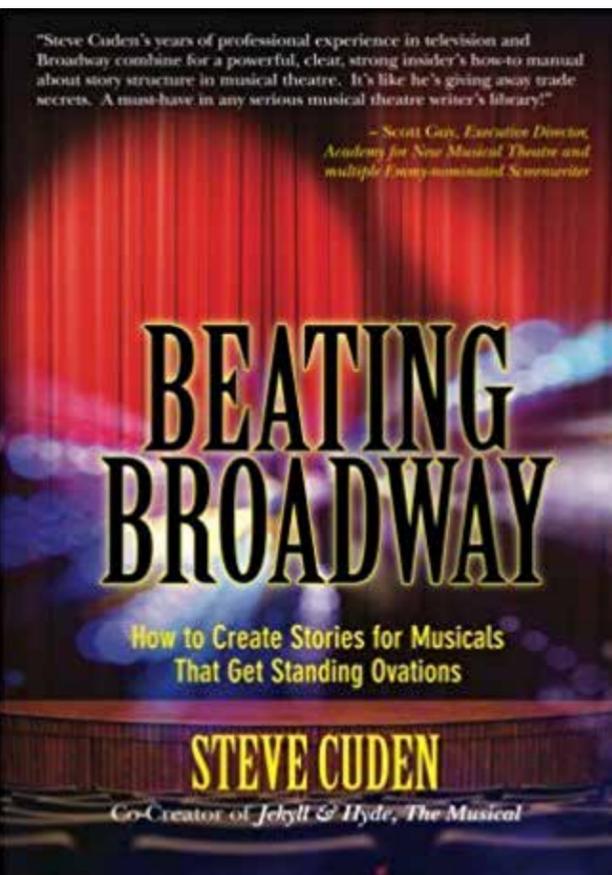
Steve Cuden is a veteran storyteller, co-creator of *Jekyll & Hyde* and *Rudolf, Affaire Mayerling* with Frank Wildhorn, and a screenwriter for feature films and television. Currently, Associate Professor of Screenwriting at Point Park University, Cuden is credited on nearly 90 teleplays and, in addition to this book, has also penned *Beating Hollywood: Tips for Creating Unforgettable Screenplays*.

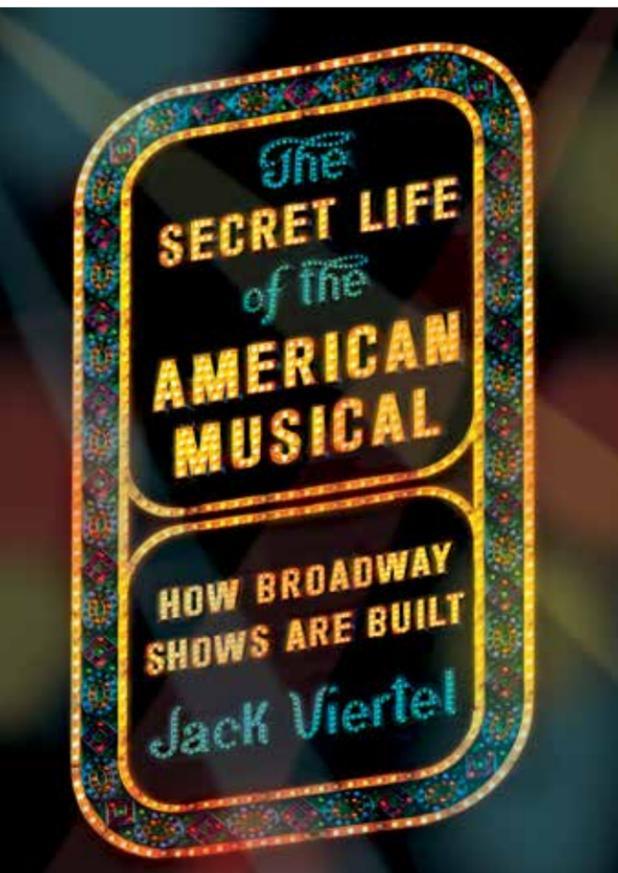
Historically, books and plays have provided the primary source material for musical adaptations. As new forms of entertainment usurp the popularity of the written word, writers and producers have shifted toward television, film, and popular music as primary source material. Cuden makes the case that structurally; modern musicals more closely resemble movies than plays, stating, "The concept of 'simple plot/complex character' is almost a mantra in Hollywood. I believe the same applies to today's musicals."

In the chapter "Form vs. Formula," Cuden stresses the importance of the fundamentals of storytelling as established by Aristotle's *Poetics*. Cuden also offers his own take on three-act story structure, introducing the "three movements to story form." Each show is broken down into three movements (beginning, middle, and end). From there, each movement is further subdivided into its own three movements (beginning, middle, and end). Cuden extrapolates further, noting that each scene, each song, even each line of dialogue should contain three separate movements of beginning, middle, and end. Other key chapters include: Character Development, Lyrics and Subtext, Making a Scene Memorable, and Rewriting.

The second half of *Beating Broadway* breaks down thirty-five Broadway musicals and five movie musicals into a series of "narrative beats." Cuden writes, "laying out a story beat-by-beat is the simplest way to piece together a tale that an audience can easily follow." Akin to the standard "beat sheet" in television and film writing, Cuden provides a fresh way of approaching story structure analysis for musicals.

*Beating Broadway* is clearly the work of a practitioner. Cuden is straightforward and engaging. Each concept and analysis is introduced, not merely for intellectual discussion, but as a means for inciting action. While the text does not include specific exercises, it does clearly discuss the essential elements of effective storytelling. In addition, the "narrative beat" breakdowns provide an ideal model for students to begin crafting stories of their own.





**THE SECRET LIFE OF THE AMERICAN MUSICAL: HOW BROADWAY SHOWS ARE BUILT** by Jack Viertel. Sarah Crichton Books/Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2017; pp. 336. \$16.00 paperback.

In the opening pages of *The Secret Life of the American Musical: How Broadway Shows Are Built*, Jack Viertel writes, “there’s pleasure in understanding this unique form of American entertainment.” Rather than a step-by-step, “How To” guide, *The Secret Life of the American Musical*, not only identifies commonalities in structure for great works of musical theatre, but explores why the structure works. In this way, Viertel has crafted a multi-purpose text that will prove useful in courses aimed at creating new work, script analysis, and musical theatre history.

Viertel speaks with authority on the subject as both a scholar and practitioner. Currently, he is the senior Vice President of Jujamcyn Theaters which operate five Broadway theatres, and he serves as artistic director of New York City Center’s Encore! series where he has overseen fifty shows. Viertel has been involved in a myriad of highly acclaimed productions from *City of Angels* to *Angels in America*, and he helped shepherd six plays by August Wilson to the Broadway stage. He has served as a creative consultant for *Hairspray*, *A Christmas Story*, and *Dear Evan Hansen*. Formerly, he served as dramaturg for the Mark Taper Forum.

The idea for the book sprang from his course at Tisch School of the Arts at New York University. Closely examining four classic musicals; *Gypsy*, *Guys and Dolls*, *My Fair Lady*, and *South Pacific*; the course pulled each piece apart word by word, “trying to piece out why every line of dialogue was there, what every lyric accomplished, and how music supported whatever the fundamental idea of the show was.” *The Secret Life of the American Musical* expands the course, and references musicals up to *Hamilton*. With his encyclopedic knowledge of the American musical theatre, Viertel adeptly lays out a structure for building musicals without falling into the trap of formula.

Songs being the showpiece and drivers of the American musical, Viertel breaks down their structure and purpose song-by-song. In-depth discussions of both “I Want” Songs and “Conditional Love” Songs is followed by analysis of what Viertel calls “The Noise.” Per Viertel, by the third or fourth song, the audience is “fused into one being by this time, and they probably need a little energy boost, a little fun, a little relaxation to restore their concentration and curiosity; they need to hear a big sound, and they probably need to watch some people dance.” Included on his list of “noise” songs would be “Put On Your Sunday Clothes,” “There’s Nothin’ Like a Dame,” “With a Little Bit of Luck,” and both “Hasa Diga Eebowai” and “Turn It Off” from *Book of Mormon*.

Later chapters identify potential pitfalls in story structure and enumerate the ways in which shows have overcome the dreaded “second act trouble.” Viertel’s easy yet knowing tone in combination with his first-hand knowledge of the challenge inherent in creating modern musicals offers a thrilling insider’s view of the action.

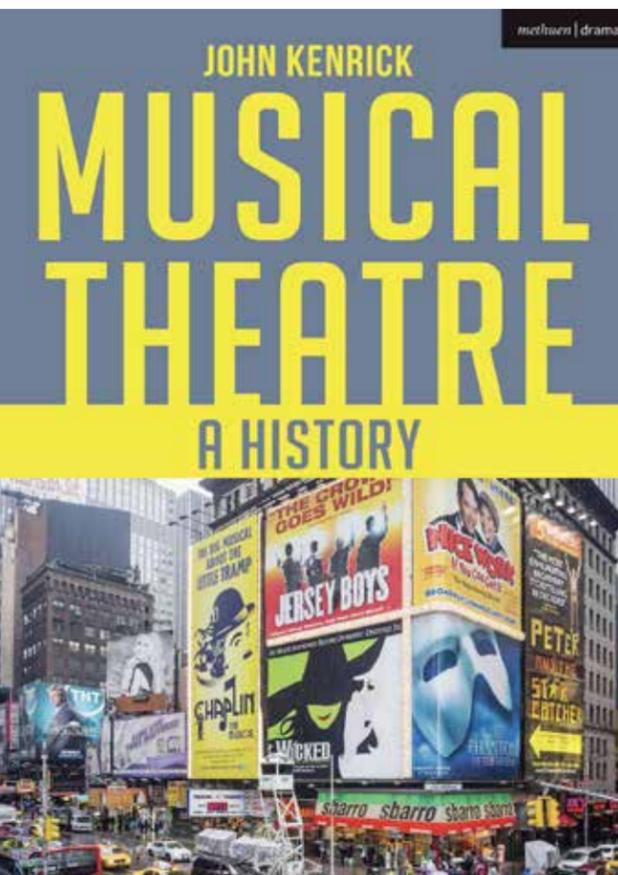
“Musicals—the great ones—are rarely about ordinary life plodding by. They’re about the outsize romance that can’t be controlled, the special world we’d love to live in for a while, the far-away time and place we’re waiting to be seduced by, the larger-than-life force of nature we so rarely encounter in real life.” Viertel invites the reader into the world we love, and page-by-page, moves us from casual observer to active participant in the form and history of the American musical theatre.

# BOOK REVIEW

by Christianne Roll

**MUSICAL THEATRE: A HISTORY, SECOND EDITION** by John Kenrick. London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2017. pp. 338. \$79.90 hardback, \$24.95 paper, \$18.99 eBook.

In the second edition of *Musical Theatre: A History*, author John Kendrick takes readers from theatrical productions of ancient Greece to 2015's *Hamilton*. Setting information about specific shows and specific performers in a historical context, this text is a comprehensive history of the birth and life of musical theatre.



Kenrick organizes his book into twenty-eight chronological chapters, making it easily accessible for a fourteen-week semester of a Musical Theatre History course in the college or university setting. The text includes an in-depth Suggested Reading Bibliography, recommended web resources, and a foreword by Oscar Hammerstein III. Oscar Andrew Hammerstein's foreword seems to set the tone for Kenrick's book which suggests, citing centuries of evidence, that the audience is the "most important factor in creating a hit musical."

Each chapter starts with a brief narrative that sets the tone about the time period and social norms of the day. These introductions, coupled with frequent references to major worldwide historical events, give the reader a detailed view of the climate from which that decade of musical theatre sprang. Kenrick goes into detail about the business and financial aspects of musical theatre productions, which could be new information to developing musical theatre

scholars. Viewing the evolution of musical theatre through this clear, historical background may be the strongest attribute of the text.

Readers looking for a thorough lineage of musical productions will find ample information about major contributions to musical theatre, as well as examples of lesser known shows in America and abroad. Many chapters, especially those that "Start at the Very Beginning" of musical theatre history, include portions of scripts and lyrics to supplement the author's narrative. Excerpts from shows, such as *The Black Crook*, *A Trip to Chinatown*, *The Mikado*, *The Merry Widow*, *Little Johnny Jones*, *Babes in Toyland*, *Knickerbocker Holiday*, and *Yip, Yip, Yaphank!* help to animate the content.

In addition to specific shows, entire chapters are devoted to influential musical theatre artists, showcasing how their lives and performances intertwined with other personalities of their respective time periods. These chapters, called Career in Profile, feature artists such as Al Jolson and Ethel Merman. The anecdotes and personal tidbits about these featured artists, and throughout the book, give an accessible, human perspective to these famous historical figures.

Although the primary focus of the book is the progression of musical theatre in New York City and across America, Kenrick also credits innovations from Europe and the United Kingdom. Detailed chapters on European operetta, Gilbert and Sullivan, and European/British influenced Mega-Musicals objectively illustrate their impact on the current trends of musical theatre.

Kenrick writes, "I think show business history is the most fascinating subject in the world. My goal is simple: to make it as entertaining and exciting for others as it is for me." The author successfully accomplishes this goal through his informative and easy to read second edition of *Musical Theatre: A History*. This up-to-date text is an indispensable resource for musical theatre history courses and theatre faculty, and for seasoned musical theatre professionals who want to refresh their appreciation of the art form.

# BOOK REVIEW

by Lusie Cuskey

## **STUDYING MUSICAL THEATRE: THEORY AND PRACTICE** by Millie Taylor and Dominic Symonds. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014; pp. v + 273. \$32.00 paperback.

In *Studying Musical Theatre: Theory and Practice*, Millie Taylor and Dominic Symonds offer a musical theatre textbook that, rather than repeating the fairly chronological history found in many musical theatre texts, uses theoretical frameworks as an underlying structure. Throughout, the authors suggest throughout that musical theatre and opera are far more related than most musical theatre scholarship would suggest, and draw liberally from both fields for their examples.

Taylor and Symonds posit that musical theatre is a complex and deeply historical subject with both academic and real-world relevance. The authors repeatedly question, explain, and refer to popular narratives frequently taught in musical theatre classrooms; in light of this, the book is probably most useful for those who already understand the musical theatre genre and are seeking ways to expand their engagement with related fields and concepts.

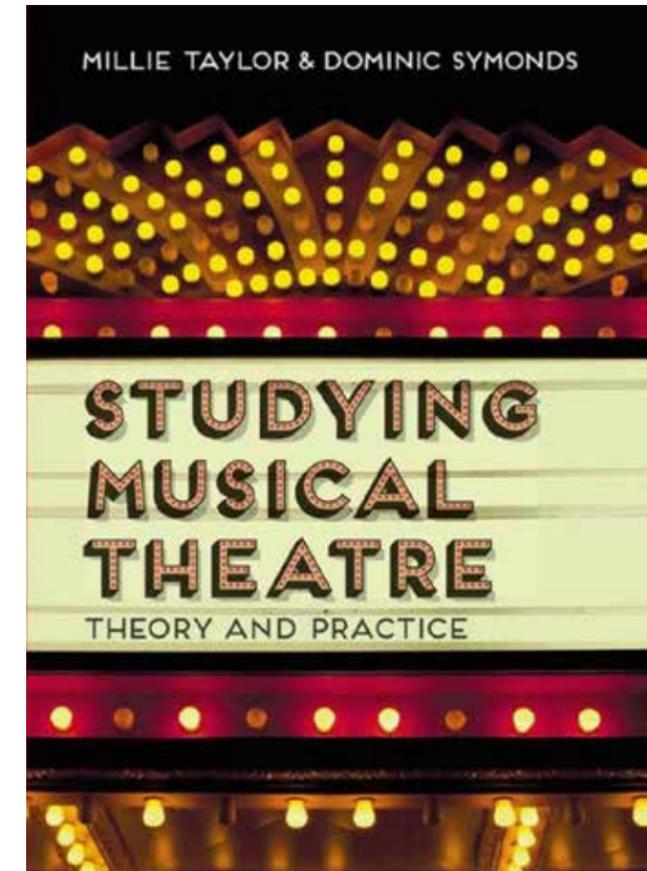
The book is divided into four sections made up of a few chapters each. Though each section is clearly intentionally organized and the chapters occasionally reference each other, each chapter is also largely written as a stand-alone essay; this means that researchers or instructors can focus on a specific topic/chapter as needed. Each chapter introduces a critical perspective(s) and uses specific musical and opera examples to unpack some of the ways the theory can be fruitfully applied to opera and musical theatre. Chapters end with a resource guide for further reading and, in fact, one of the book's primary strengths lies in the authors' collation and interpretation of a dizzying variety of theorists and scholars.

Taylor and Symonds are at their best when translating challenging theoretical concepts into accessible summaries. Of the four sections in the book, Part I is the strongest. In it, the authors offer a comprehensive vision of the multiple ways audiences might interpret a piece of opera or musical theatre. Chapter 2, specifically, is effective; the authors' explanation of the sometimes challenging

concepts of semiotics and semiology are very clear, and they break down the many different potential planes of meaning in a work of music theatre or opera with well-selected examples that effectively model historical, musicological, and formal analyses. The engagement with cultural materialism in Chapter 4 is also a bright spot. Raymond Williams' theories are concisely laid out, and the authors' case study of the ways in which different sociopolitical contexts altered the received meaning of different productions of *Cabaret* is particularly well done.

In contrast, chapters in Parts II and III specifically dealing with the identity politics of marginalized groups are less effective. Though these chapters draw from important scholars in their respective fields and the concept summaries are generally effective, their organization is less logical. The chapter on orientalism, for example, is really about post-colonialism and racial and ethnic identities more broadly. Chapter 10, which engages with sex and sexuality (with a particular focus, for most of the chapter, on LGBTQ+ identities), is the weakest of the book. Atypically, Taylor and Symonds use "queer" throughout without fully unpacking the theory or layers of meaning around the word. The reader is left with the impression of a simple, slightly undesirable abnormality rather than the complex goulash of off-centeredness and unconventionality the theoretical term carries, or the fierce and intentional reclamation and celebration that often accompanies the term as an identity category. This limits the term's usefulness within the chapter, and may be off-putting to the reader. Taylor and Symonds ultimately conclude that musicals with LGBTQ characters are seldom able to escape the spectre of queerness to achieve mainstream appeal. (The assumption that LGBTQ characters are written primarily with the goal of "humanizing" them for a straight and cisgendered audience is, on its face, deeply problematic.) The authors also (aside from *Little Shop of Horrors*) only analyze musicals where characters are diegetically and self-consciously performing their gender and sexual diversity (*The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, *La Cage Aux Folles*, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*); they omit any analysis of musical theatre works where LGBTQ characters are much less intentional in their performance of queerness.

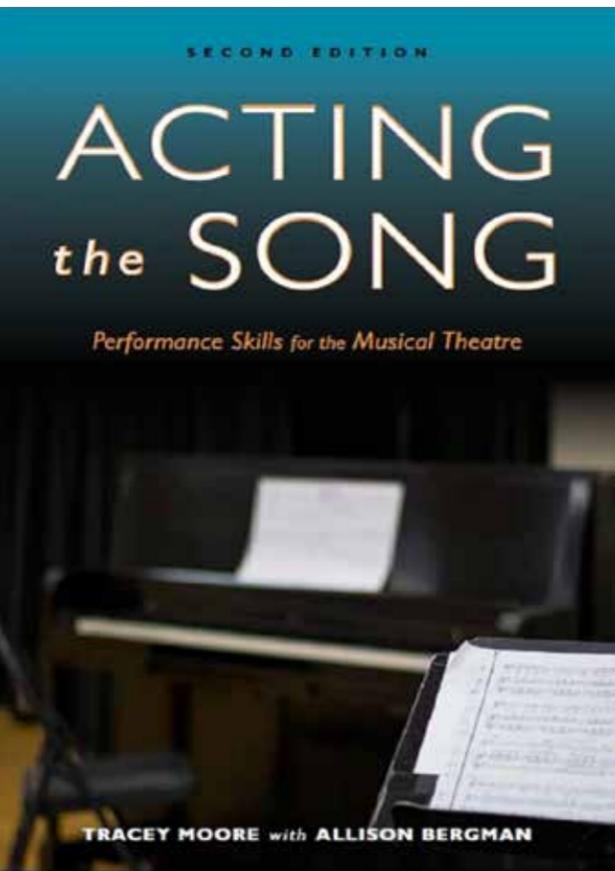
*Studying Musical Theatre: Theory and Practice* isn't a conventional musical theatre history text. It is, however, an excellent resource for readers hoping to gain a deeper theoretical base and more fully consider the ways musical theatre and opera interact with the world around them.



# BOOK REVIEW

by Brian Manternach

**ACTING THE SONG: PERFORMANCE SKILLS FOR THE MUSICAL THEATRE, SECOND EDITION, and ACTING THE SONG: STUDENT COMPANION EBOOK by Tracey Moore (with Allison Bergman). New York: Allworth Press, 2017; pp. 324. \$24.99 paperback; \$9.99 Companion eBook.**



Gone are the days when a singer's glorious voice could excuse poor acting skills. Training programs are placing more emphasis on building actors who are willing to explore, collaborate, and develop unique, connected interpretations of their material. On this journey, *Acting the Song: Performance Skills for the Musical Theatre, second edition*, can be an invaluable companion.

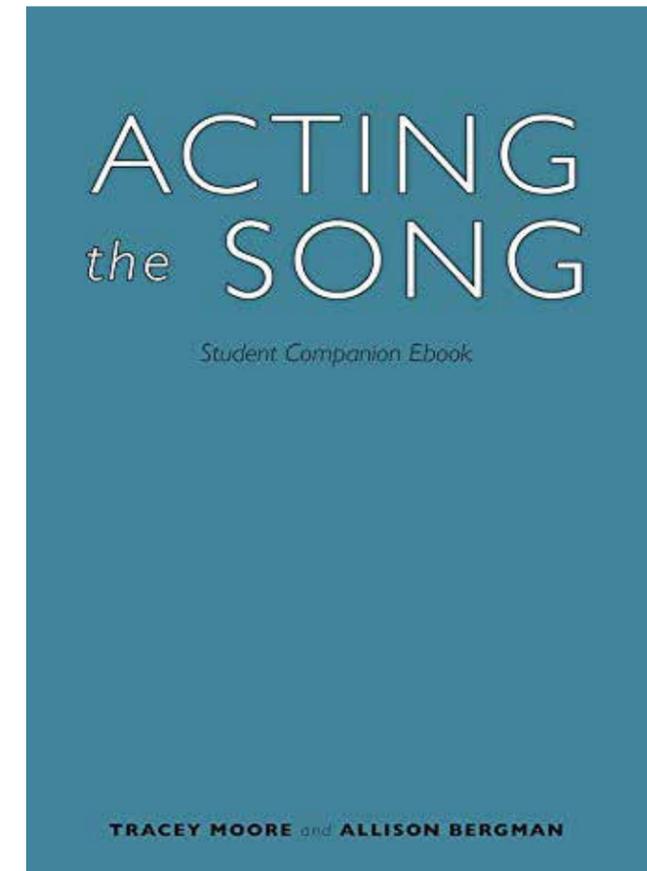
The book is divided into three sections. The "Elements" is an exploration of the voice and body and acting principles. This introductory section is designed to provide an overview and a common vocabulary for teachers from different backgrounds. The second section, the "Classroom," provides a curriculum for a two- or three-semester performance course. This "musical theatre workshop" is divided into three chapters for beginning, intermediate, and advanced students. Included are exercises, teaching suggestions, and worksheets that move from "personalization" to "characterization." The author writes, "The objective of the musical theatre classroom should not be to find the 'right' or even the 'best' performance but to try all kinds of things in an effort to increase the skills of the individual actor."

Section three, "Practical Use," moves out of the classroom to address auditioning, rehearsing, and performing. Here the authors discuss the preparation, deportment, and professionalism that is expected once students leave the university setting. This section differs considerably from the first edition and now covers audition videos, an in-depth look at repertoire, and following up after the audition.

The book is meant to be used in tandem with *Acting the Song: Student Companion ebook*. Teachers who buy *Acting the Song* can ask their students to read the *Companion*, which will better help them prepare for class. The *Companion* also includes completed, sample worksheets done by former students, as well as some links to websites for finding music and doing research.

There is much to be gained from *Acting the Song*. Teachers will find endless exercises to explore with their students, and the worksheets provide a structured lesson plan. There are suggested reading lists at the end of each chapter and a companion website ([actingthesong.com](http://actingthesong.com)) where many of the resources may be downloaded for classroom use. The book recognizes and honors each teacher's ability to alter or expand the provided exercises or to skip them if they are not needed, saying: "Our goal is to give you some new ideas to enhance your teaching, not to overrule it."

A tremendous guide for singing actors from student to professional, *Acting the Song* provides effective tools to unlock every singing actor's creative potential.



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**TOM ANDOLORA** is a playwright, acting coach, director, and voice teacher in NYC. He has been a theatre educator for 35 years. His play, *The Spoon River Project*, a new adaptation of *Spoon River Anthology*, is published by Playscripts. It has been performed in high schools, colleges, and theatres all over the country. Tom coaches students entering BFA programs. Tom was a member of the faculty at Brooklyn College for several years, teaching musical theatre in the Preparatory Center. His site is [www.TomAndolora.com](http://www.TomAndolora.com).

**JULIO AGUSTIN (MATOS), JR.** has performed on Broadway in the original companies of *Fosse*, *Steel Pier*, *Never Gonna Dance*, *Bells Are Ringing* (revival), *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*, and was featured opposite Bebe Neuwirth in *Chicago*. He recently published his first book, *The Professional Actor's Handbook: From Casting Call to Curtain Call* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2017). He holds an MFA degree in Directing from Pennsylvania State University and is a Certified Practitioner with the One Voice Centre for Integrative Studies. Julio runs The Transition Workshop, a monthly audition studio in New York City ([www.JulioAgustin.com](http://www.JulioAgustin.com)). A member of SDC, AEA, SAG-AFTRA, and VASTA, he is currently an associate professor at James Madison University.

**DAVID COOLIDGE** is an Assistant Professor, Director of Musical Theatre at Anderson University (IN) and a certified Master Teacher in Archetypes for Singers and Actors. He is the former Assistant Artistic Director of TheatreworksUSA in New York City, where he directed six national tours, oversaw thirty touring productions, and adapted twelve children's books to the stage. His work with SPASIGMA provides cutting edge business training by combining education and entertainment. David performed in the Broadway National Tour of *Parade*, directed by Hal Prince, and in Jeff Calhoun's highly acclaimed pre-Broadway production of *Big River* at Deaf West Theatre.

**LUSIE CUSKEY** is a PhD student in Theatre Studies at the University of Kansas. She has worked as an actor, director, teaching artist, and technician in Kentucky, Oregon, New York, and throughout the upper Midwest. Research interests include queer and feminist musical theatre, theatre pedagogy, and theatre that explores the intersections of sexuality and faith.

**JOE DEER** is the Distinguished Professor of Musical Theatre at Wright State University, where he is also Director of The Musical Theatre Initiative. Deer is author of *Acting in Musical Theatre: A Comprehensive Course* (co-author Rocco Dal Vera), and *Directing in Musical Theatre: An Essential Guide* (both published by Routledge). He was the founding president of the Musical Theatre Educators' Alliance.

**MARY ANNA DENNARD** founded the first online prep for college performing arts applicants and authored *I Got In! The Ultimate College Audition Guide For Acting And Musical Theatre*. She received her training at The American Conservatory Theatre and worked as a casting director in Los Angeles. Her fifteen years of casting credits have garnered Clios, Emmys, a Peabody Award, and Academy Awards.

**JEREMIAH DOWNES** is Director of Music Theatre Voice at Western Michigan University. He spent over 15 years as a successful actor on stage in leading roles, world premieres and alongside some of Broadway's finest both in NYC and regionally. He continues to maintain a private studio in New York City and Philadelphia where his clients have success on Broadway, in film and on television, in opera houses and recording studios. Prior to his appointment at Western Michigan University he served as Assistant Professor of Musical Theatre & B.F.A. Coordinator at Emory & Henry College. For more, <http://www.jeremiahdownes.com>.

**TIM FINK** serves as head of the opera and music theater area in the School of Music at Southern Illinois University - Carbondale. He has served for 13 years as Artistic Director of the McLeod Summer Playhouse, and was also Artistic Director for the Clinton Area Showboat Theatre. At SIUC his duties include directing and/or music directing musicals and operas, teaching Musical Theater History, Opera and Music Theater Workshop and private voice instruction, especially to musical theater students. He has an MM in Voice from the University of Arizona and an MFA in Theater Direction from SIUC.

**JOEL GELPE** is in his eleventh year as Music Director/Coach/Accompanist for the BFA Musical Theatre program at Ithaca College, where he also teaches American Musical Theatre History & Analysis as well as Musical Theatre Repertoire & Style. Before landing in Ithaca, Joel freelanced in New York City, was Associate Music

Director of the 25th Anniversary National Tour of *Evita* (Larry Fuller, Director), and was the long-time Resident Music Director of the Albuquerque Civic Light Opera Association and Music Director of the Albuquerque Philharmonic.

**DOUGLAS S. HALL** has worked at theatres across the country including the Finger Lakes Musical Theatre Festival, The Williamstown Theater Festival, Mountain Playhouse, Seven Angels Theater. Directing credits include *Always... Patsy Cline* (starring Sally Mayes); *Tenderly*, *The Rosemary Clooney Musical*; *The Lonesome West*; and the New York premiere of *The Religion Thing*. He directed the short film, "Second Glance," which has been screened at film festivals across the country. He directs the New York Industry Showcase for the Federation of Drama Schools in the UK, has taught at CAP 21, Pace University, and is currently on the faculty at the University of South Florida in Tampa.

**SHARON KINNISON** offers a twenty-year career as an actor, singer, director, educator, and writer. She has served as an educational consultant/workshop presenter for schools and theatres in the San Francisco Bay Area, Tennessee, and Kentucky. Sharon is the Director of the Fine and Performing Arts for Louisville Collegiate School. During the summer months, she is a full-time faculty member in musical theatre for the Kentucky Governor's School for the Arts. She maintains a private voice studio, coaching students in classical and musical theatre repertoire, and offering college audition preparation. Sharon holds a BS from the University of Kentucky in voice and theatre and an MFA from the University of Louisville.

**BRIAN MANTERNACH** is an Assistant Professor in the University of Utah's Department of Theatre. His performances range from opera (*The Magic Flute*) to operetta (*Die Fledermaus*) to music theatre (*A Funny Thing...Forum*). He is an Associate Editor of the Journal of Singing, authors "The Singer's Library" column for Classical Singer, and has given presentations for the Voice Foundation, the Pan-American Vocology Association, the National Center for Voice and Speech, TEDxSaltLakeCity, and NATS. Portions of this review were originally published in *Classical Singer Magazine*. Reprinted here with permission. Learn more at [www.brianmanternach.com](http://www.brianmanternach.com).

**RYAN MCKINNEY** serves as an Associate Professor of Theatre and Director of the Theatre Program at Kingsborough Community of the City University of New York. He has taught at Western Connecticut State University, Five Towns College, Pace University, Marymount Manhattan College and San Diego State University. Acting/Directing credits include works at The Harbor Lights Theatre Company, The Garden Theatre, The Contemporary American Theatre Festival, Moonlight Amphitheatre and NBC's *Law & Order: SVU*. He serves as the Chair of Musical Theatre for Region I of KCACTF, holds an M.F.A. in Musical Theatre from San Diego State University and an M.A. in Theatre Studies from Hunter College.

**MATTHEW TEAGUE MILLER** is an assistant professor at Chico State and the Producing Artistic Director of Clinton Area Showboat Theatre, a professional summer theatre in Iowa. Matty received his BFA in Musical Theatre from CCM and his MFA in Directing from University of North Carolina Greensboro. An AEA actor

who spent three years touring with the Trevor Nunn Broadway Production of *Les Misérables*, Matty performed in Shang Hai China opposite Colm Wilkinson in his final performance of Jean Valjean.

**JEREMY RYAN MOSSMAN** is a musical theatre voice specialist and vocal coach, currently on the music faculty at Carthage College in Kenosha, WI. He is a Certified Master Teacher of the Estill model for voice, a certified yoga instructor, and working toward full certification as a Feldenkrais Practitioner. His teaching combines objective truths about vocal function and body mechanics with organic, contextual learning. Visit <http://www.patreon.com/simplesingingstrategies>.

**CHRISTIANNE ROLL** is an internationally recognized expert on the female belt voice. She received her BFA in Musical Theatre from the CAP21 studio of New York University. Her Doctorate is from Columbia University, where she focused her studies and research on musical theatre vocal pedagogy. A member of AEA, Christianne has performed at the Goodspeed Opera House, the Lucille Lortel Theatre, the York Theatre, and internationally as a principal singer for Norwegian Cruise Lines. As an educator, Christianne is the Coordinator of the BFA Musical Theatre Program of Florida Southern College.

**AMY ROGERS SCHWARTZREICH** is the director and founder of the B.F.A Musical Theater Program at Pace University in New York City. She is a highly-regarded academic, teacher, administrator, theater director and performer who has directed over 20 new works and over 50 musicals in professional and academic settings. Amy most recently performed with Emma Thompson and Bryn Terfel in *Sweeney Todd* with the New York Philharmonic. Originally from Canada, Amy has a Master of Fine Arts in Musical Theater from San Diego State University. Amy is passionate about the training the next generation of musical theater artists.

**DAVID SISCO** has served on the voice faculties of Northeastern University, Suffolk University, and Marymount Manhattan College. He now maintains a private studio in New York and leads masterclasses and workshops nationally and internationally. With business partner Laura Josepher, David runs [contemporarymusicaltheatre.com](http://contemporarymusicaltheatre.com). Together, they are the authors of *Mastering College Musical Theatre Auditions: Sound Advice for the Student, Teacher, and Parent*. David is currently collaborating with Tom Gualtieri on two musicals: *Falling to Earth*, and a forthcoming project with book writer Michael Zam. Visit [davidsisco.com](http://davidsisco.com).

**NICOLE STINTON** has worked as a director, vocal coach, and actor for over two decades across Australasia, specializing in music theatre. She was Artistic Director of *Short+Sweet* for several years in Singapore and Malaysia. Nicole has taught acting and singing to tertiary students throughout her career, including at WAAPA (Australia) and Lasalle (Singapore). Nicole is the author of textbooks on Drama that are widely used in the Australian education system. She holds an MBA in Entertainment Management, a Bachelor in Musical Theatre and is a current PhD candidate. She is currently Course Coordinator for the new Diploma of Musical Theatre at WAAPA.

**ANNETTE THORNTON** is an associate professor at Central Michigan University where she teaches courses in music theatre performance and history. Directing credits include two KC-ACTF Certificates of Merit for Directing: *Blood Wedding* and *Oklahoma!* Thornton is co-editor of *Physical Dramaturgy: Perspectives from the Field*, to be published by Routledge in Spring of 2018. She has studied mime with Marcel Marceau and Meyerhold's Theatrical Biomechanics with Gennadi Bogdanov, and is a certified yoga teacher. Dr. Thornton was the president of Association of Theatre Movement Educators from 2012-2016.



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# SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Musical Theatre Educators' Alliance International was founded in 1999 as a means for teachers of young professional artists to come together and exchange ideas, methodologies, and solutions to common challenges in the academic settings of universities and conservatories. We welcome submissions in a variety of formats (written text, digital, artwork). You do not need to be a member of MTEA to submit. The deadline for submissions for the second issue will be July 15, 2018.

## SUBJECT AREAS

Music theatre education covers a variety of subject areas including, but not limited to:

<i>acting</i>	<i>choreography</i>	<i>mental and physical health</i>
<i>singing</i>	<i>design or production</i>	<i>practicing</i>
<i>music</i>	<i>musical film</i>	<i>career concerns</i>
<i>dance</i>	<i>digital entrepreneurship</i>	<i>tenure and promotion</i>
<i>movement</i>	<i>new media</i>	<i>collaboration</i>
<i>audition techniques</i>	<i>composition</i>	<i>workplace issues</i>
<i>career preparation</i>	<i>lyric-writing</i>	<i>techniques</i>
<i>social media and publicity</i>	<i>music theatre history</i>	<i>coaching</i>
<i>direction</i>	<i>repertoire</i>	<i>recruitment</i>
<i>music direction</i>	<i>new works development</i>	<i>industry trends</i>

Our focus is primarily the college level (undergrad and grad), but we welcome submissions having to do with the professional career or with high school that are relevant to our membership or mission. We also seek interviews with notable people, and book, cast album, or performance reviews.

## HOW TO SUBMIT

Submissions are peer reviewed and recommended into three categories:

1. Accepted for publication
2. Assigned to a Subject Editor for editing and rewrites as needed
3. Recommended for re-submit after substantial rewrite for current/future issues
4. Declined

There is no limit or requirement on submission length, however, the editorial staff reserves the right to edit any piece for length. If requested rewrites are not returned by assigned deadline, the piece will not be published. If your piece is selected for publication, you must sign a release giving permission for use by MTEA or the piece will not be published. Please submit in a Word (.docx) file and send via email to: **Tracey Moore at [journalmtea@gmail.com](mailto:journalmtea@gmail.com)**.





# FEATURED PHOTOGRAPHY

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**Photo 02** | *The Drowsy Chaperone*, University of Texas at Austin. Photo by Lawrence Peart.

**Photo 03** | *Aida*, University of Northern Colorado. Photo by David Grapes.

**Photo 04** | [title of show], Webster University. Photo courtesy of Webster University.

**Photo 05** | *Bonnie & Clyde*, The Danish National School of Performing Arts. Photo by Søren Malmose.

**Photo 06** | *Spider Woman*, The Danish National School of Performing Arts. Photo by Søren Malmose.

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**Photo 25** | *Emojland (LiveRead@SDA)*, University of Southern California. Photo by Craig Schwartz..

**Photo 26** | *Emojland (LiveRead@SDA)*, University of Southern California. Photo by Craig Schwartz.

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