

The American Musical Theatre

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This course explores the American musical's ability to maintain populist appeal and continually reflect the changing political and socio-cultural moods of the nation, especially in relation to the economic health of the City of New York. This course is designed for undergraduates who seek greater understanding of the American commercial theater industry, the cultural life of New York City, and the changing sociocultural moods of the country as reflected in American popular art, especially in the decades since World War II.

This course explores the American musical from minstrelsy, vaudeville, operetta and burlesque in the nineteenth century through its "golden age" (1930-50). Attention then turns to the aesthetic, economic, and political development of the genre after World War II. The focus of the final portion of the course shifts to recent and contemporary developments, including the rock musical, the megamusical, and the musical theatre's relationship to film.

Required Reading

In lieu of a required text for this course, there is a required website. Students should bookmark www.musicals101.com, from which readings will regularly be assigned. Any supplemental readings will be provided by the professor.

Course Requirements

There will be one theater report, one 8- to 10-page term paper, one midterm examination, and one final. Exams are not cumulative.

Reports and papers are to be turned in on time. Unless an extension is requested in advance and a new due-date established (and held to), late papers will be dropped a full grade with each passing day. Thus, an "A" paper turned in a day late will become a "B" paper; if it is turned in two days late, it will be a "C". As long as you communicate with me well in advance of the due-date, there will be no penalties for requested extensions.

Here's the grade breakdown:

Theater Report: 20%

Midterm Exam: 20%

Final Exam: 25%

Final Paper: 25%

Class Participation: 10%

Policies

More than five unexcused absences will result in a grade of F. Consistent lateness will adversely affect your participation grade.

I fully support Baruch College's policy on Academic Honesty, which states in part, "Academic dishonesty is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Cheating, forgery, plagiarism and collusion in dishonest acts undermine the college's educational mission and the students' personal and intellectual growth. Baruch students are expected to bear individual responsibility for their work and to uphold the ideal of academic integrity. Any

student who attempts to compromise or devalue the academic process will be sanctioned."

Any student caught cheating in this class will be reported to the dean of students and will receive an F on the assignment in question.

SYLLABUS

Day 1

Course Introduction

Day 2

The 18th to mid-19th century

Vaudeville, minstrelsy, pantomime, operetta, and burlesque

Day 3

Vaudeville, minstrelsy, pantomime, operetta, and burlesque, continued

Day 4

The development of the musical form: 1900-1920

Day 5

1900-1920, continued

Day 6

African-American Musical Theater in the 1920s

Day 7

Show Boat and the "New" Musical

Day 8

The "New" Musical, continued

Day 9

The 1920s and 1930s: The Gershwins

Day 10

Irving Berlin; Cole Porter

Day 11

Rodgers and Hart

Day 12

Rodgers and Hammerstein

Day 13

The 1940s

MUSICAL REPORTS ARE DUE

Day 14

The 1940s, continued

Day 15
The 1950s

Day 16
MIDTERM EXAMINATION IN CLASS

Day 17
The 1950s, continued

Day 18
The 1960s and the fall of Tin Pan Alley

Day 19
The 1960s, continued

Day 20
The 1970s and Fragmented Musicals

Day 21
Fragmented Musicals, continued

Day 22
The Rock Musical

Day 23
The Rock Musical, Continued

Day 24
The Megamusical and the "New" Times Square

Day 25
The "New" Times Square, continued

Day 26
The "New" Times Square, continued

Day 27
Current Status of the Musical

Day 28
Current Status, continued; conclusions;
Term papers are due

Assignments

1) Guidelines for the Musical Report

Technical details:

The report should be concise (3-4 pages), typed, double-spaced, and spell-checked. Please hand in a program, ticket stub, or other proof of attendance with your finished report.

What sort of show should I attend?

Any one that fits the scope of this course. A musical comedy on or Off Broadway would be appropriate; Ozzfest, or a concert of Beethoven sonatas would not. If you have doubts as to an appropriate outing, talk to me.

How should I approach this project?

At the musical, try to observe as much as you possibly can, both on the stage and off. Observe the entire scene around you. Take notes.

What should I be looking/listening for?

Here are some details you might wish to consider. You do not have to touch on all of them for this report; these are just some ideas.

The show itself: Who are the actors, and what are they doing on-stage? How do they work together as an ensemble? Does one person stand out over all the rest? Why? How do the visual aspects relate to the aural ones? How is the plot? Do you like the music? Do plot and music work well together? If not, why not? If so, why?

The audience: Who are they, and how do they react? Are they bored? Dancing in the aisles? Rioting in the streets? Why? How does the interaction between performers/spectators enhance (or detract from) the show?

The space: Where is the musical being performed? Is the musical in a big Broadway theater? A tiny Off Off Broadway show? A YMCA or church basement in Queens? A Himalayan mountaintop? How does the space relate to the musical?

The music: What is the instrumentation? Do you like it or do you hate it? Are the performers good or bad singers? Why or why not?

Please remember that your work should be entirely your own. Plagiarism will not be tolerated. To this end: You may attend a musical with a friend from class—just make sure that you DO NOT exchange notes or discuss your reports, post-event!

Questions? Comments? Concerns? Come see me!

2) Final paper guidelines

Final Papers: Due on or Before Monday, December 18 (final exam date)

- 1) Papers should have a clear direction, with a proper introductory statement and a conclusion. You may write on any topic you like, as long as it is appropriate to the course. You are strongly encouraged to work with me and with Anthony to both select a viable topic and shape the final paper.
- 2) Papers should be of an appropriate length. A 25-page paper is much too long; a 3-page paper is much too short. Ideally, as stated in the syllabus, you should aim for 7-10 pages. That said, 6 pages of brilliant, well-organized, well documented prose will fare far better than 15 pages of rambling, disorganized drivel.
- 3) You **MUST** turn in a complete bibliography with this project. You should aim for as many or more book sources as web sites; the latter are often not as reliable as the former. Bibliographies must be complete and consistent across entries.
- 4) All writing, no matter the type, features a blend of subjective (opinion-based) and objective (factual) reasoning. There is plenty of room for both fact and opinion in a formal essay. There is, however, no room at all for slang or chatty asides, which tend to dumb-down what are otherwise compelling arguments.
- 5) All sources that you use **MUST** be noted within the body of the text, either in footnotes or parenthetical citations at the ends of appropriate sentences or paragraphs. You are free to use any citation system, as long as your system is consistent. You **MUST** include the author and page number of any written source, and/or the addresses of any websites you visit, as well as the date you visited them. Anyone caught plagiarizing **EVEN ONE SENTENCE** of their final paper will receive a 0 on their project and will be reported to the dean of students.
- 6) Questions? Comments? Concerns? Let me know!

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