Course Description:

This course focuses on the American musical theatre of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries and will involve a survey of the history of the Broadway musical through the study of selected works from the repertoire. We will look at how the different elements of the musical (music, lyrics, book, choreography, and direction) work together to create a performance.

Other questions that we will consider:
- How do scholars perceive musicals within a cultural context?
- What structural and performance conventions typify the Broadway musical as a genre and how have these conventions changed?

Learning Objectives:

Students will be expected to achieve a general knowledge of the history of the American musical theatre through lectures, listening, and the course readings. Students will be expected to complete writing assignments using creative thinking and written language skills. Students will also learn to critique performance aspects of theatre and apply this knowledge in a review of a live performance.

Evaluation:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Assignment Type</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Short written assignment</td>
<td>October 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>30%</td>
<td>Mid-term examination</td>
<td>October 24</td>
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<tr>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Performance review</td>
<td>December 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>30%</td>
<td>Final examination</td>
<td>Date TBA (in final exam period)</td>
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There is no textbook for this course. Course readings (journal articles) will be available online through various databases. USB of the musical examples will be on reserve and available for borrowing through the Music Library.

*You will be required to attend a live performance of a musical theatre production in order to fulfill the requirements of one of the written assignments. I will make you aware of as many options as possible in London, but you may choose to see a performance elsewhere.
Course Schedule:

Week 1  September 12  Introduction: The Elements of the Musical

Week 2  September 19  The Mega Musical
Lloyd Webber: *Cats*; Schoenberg and Boublil: *Les Misérables*

Week 3  September 26  Disney and Other Tales
Ashman and Mencken: *Beauty and the Beast*; Schwartz: *Wicked*

Week 4  October 3  Modern Classics
Simon and Norman: *The Secret Garden*; Guettel: *The Light in the Piazza*
*First written assignment due in class*

Week 5  October 17  The Mini Musical
Brown: *The Last Five Years*; Bowen and Bell: *[title of show]*

Week 6  October 24  *Mid-Term Examination*

Week 7  October 31  Back to the Beginning: Operetta
Gilbert and Sullivan: *The Pirates of Penzance*; Kern: *Show Boat*

Week 8  November 7  Rodgers and Hammerstein
Rodgers and Hammerstein: *Oklahoma!* and *South Pacific*
Read the article: Andrea Most, “‘You’ve Got to Be Carefully Taught’: The Politics of Race in Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *South Pacific*” in *Theatre Journal* Vol. 52/3 (2000). In Project MUSE database.

Week 9  November 14  The Golden Era of Broadway
Loesser: *Guys and Dolls*; Willson: *The Music Man*

Week 10  November 21  Dance Tells the Story
Bernstein: *West Side Story*; Kander and Ebb: *Chicago*

Week 11  November 28  Sex, Drugs, and Rock Musicals
Larson: *Rent*; Kitt and Yorkey: *Next to Normal*

Week 12  December 5  Stephen Sondheim
Sondheim: *Sweeney Todd* and *Sunday in the Park with George*
*Performance Review assignment due in class*
Assignment: Performance and Reception History (Due October 3)

Objectives:

To increase independent research skills by accessing historical materials in periodicals and databases. To assess musical theatre reviews from significant sources in preparation for your own theatre review assignment.

Directions:

A list of thirty-one musicals will be posted on the course OWL. Select the musical that corresponds with the date of your birthday; i.e., my birthday is October 19, so I would choose the nineteenth musical on the list. Write a performance and reception history of this musical.

Using any and all research tools you can (internet, books on musical theatre history, old newspapers or entertainment magazines), learn about your show’s performance history, including workshops, out of town previews, original Broadway or Off-Broadway runs, major regional productions and revivals. Note directors and other members of the directorial team, designers, significant stars. Then, research a reception history: what did critics have to say about the show in its various stages and incarnations? What elements of the production does the critic mention (music, lyrics, design, direction, acting, etc.)? What kinds of words and language does the critic use to enliven their review?

Write a short paper describing what you have learned about this show and its performance and reception history. You might consider whether the early critics had an impact on the show’s long term success or how the critical reception to the show has changed over the show’s history. Include a list of sources you used for your research, using the Chicago Manual of Style for your citations. Check the Music Library for a helpful handout on how to cite sources using Chicago Style.

Formatting guidelines:

Approximately 2 double-spaced pages in a 12-point standard font (prefer Times New Roman), with no more than 1.25” margins. There is no need for a title page for this assignment; just include your identifying information on the top of the first page.

Sources:

*The New York Times* is an absolute must! You may use the online version through the ProQuest database (ProQuest Historical Newspapers New York Times version). Ask for help at Weldon or the Music Library on the second floor of Talbot College if you are not familiar with accessing or using this type of resource. Other useful sources could be *The New Yorker* or *Variety* magazine, or any other major newspaper or entertainment publication. The Music Library also has a good selection of general musical theatre history books; you’ll also find numerous online sources.
Performance Review Assignment (Due December 5)

Objective:

To apply what you have learned about musical theatre to a specific production, to consider what you have observed and transform it into ideas of your own, to think critically about the theatre and become an active participant in the creation of the theatrical experience, and to enhance your own writing skills.

Directions:

Book a ticket to a show after ascertaining that it is, indeed, a musical! (Be really clear on this matter: reviews of operas and straight plays will not be accepted for credit.)

Briefly familiarize yourself with the small booklet Evaluating a Performance by Michael Greenwald (in the course reserves binders in the music library). Be aware that Greenwald is writing mainly about reviewing plays, but that the same guidelines that he discusses can easily be adapted to the review of musicals. Use the appendices in the Greenwald book to note the kind of questions that should be answered in the course of your review. You might photocopy these few pages to take along with you to jot notes during intermission or after the performance. Remember that you will need to add some notes to account for the fact that you are seeing a musical; therefore, the questions on “Why is this good theatre?” will certainly include something about the composer and lyricist’s contribution, not just the book writer. Any comments you make about performers will not only include their acting skills, but their vocal and dance skills, as applicable.

On show night, get to the theatre early enough to read the program. There will likely be a set of program notes written by the director and possibly the designer of the show. These will often be very helpful in understanding a concept, or why certain directorial and design choices were made. If you can read a plot synopsis of the show before going, even better.

Formatting guidelines:

3-4 pages in a 12-point standard font (prefer Times or Times New Roman). Double-spaced with no more than 1.25” margins. Include a title page with an interesting title that encapsulates your experience watching this musical; i.e., just the word Follies on your title page does not tell me anything about how you felt about the show.

You will also need to attach a ticket stub to prove that you went to the show during this term. (If you are a collector and are concerned about getting your program and ticket back in good condition for your scrapbook, you may photocopy the stub and the main information page of the program and include that instead.)

*For all assignments: “The 24 Hour Rule” If you are unsure or unhappy about the mark you received on an assignment, you must have the assignment back in your possession for at least 24 hours before initiating any communication protesting or questioning the mark. This gives you time to consider the comments and grade given by the marker. After the 24-hour mark, I am happy to make an appointment with you to help you understand how your mark was derived.
University and Course Policies

Who can take this course:

It is your responsibility to find out if you may take this course for credit. Please ensure you have any prerequisites required or permission from your Dean or academic advisor to take this course. If you do not have permission to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

Plagiarism:

The University has a strict policy on plagiarism and academic integrity:

“Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or a passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a serious academic offense (see Scholastic Offense Policy in the Western Academic Calendar).”

Furthermore:

“The University of Western Ontario uses software for plagiarism checking. Students may be required to submit their written work in electronic form for plagiarism checking.” All work for this course is to be performed independently and must be new work. A student cannot submit work that has been previously handed in for another course.

Accommodation on Medical or Compassionate Grounds:

Any missed assignments will require a doctor’s certificate. If you need additional time to meet course expectations for medical or compassionate reasons, in addition to contacting me, please see Diane Mills, Academic Counsellor of the Faculty of Music, or the Academic Counsellor in your home faculty in order to obtain proper documentation.

Appeals:

Student appeals that relate to this or any course (marks, grade appropriateness of assignments, or grading practices) are heard first by: 1) the course instructor (informal consultation); 2) the Department Chair (submission of written request); 3) the Dean of the Faculty (submission of written request). Details of the appeal process, grounds of appeal, and examples of relief are given in the Academic Calendar.

It is your responsibility to meet all assigned deadlines. Extensions will not be given.*

*There may be extenuating circumstances that allow an exception to this rule; talk to me.