Instructor: Prof. Kristina Baron-Woods
Office hours: Tuesdays 3 - 5 pm, other times by appointment

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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:

15%  Reception History          Due January 28
35%  Mid-term examination       February 11
20%  Performance review         Due March 31
30%  Final examination          During spring exam period*

There is no textbook for this course. Course readings (journal articles) will be available online through various databases. A 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 during this term 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 and Toronto, but you may choose to see a performance elsewhere.

* Students are advised not to make travel and/or employment arrangements for the summer until after the official final exam schedule is posted by the Registrar’s Office. Exceptions to the exam date will not be made.
Course Schedule:

Week 1  January 7  Introduction to the Course/Elements of Musical Theatre  
Pasek and Paul: Dear Evan Hansen

Week 2  January 14  The Mega Musical  
Lloyd Webber: Cats; Schoenberg and Boublil: Les Misérables

Week 3  January 21  Disney and Other Tales  
Ashman and Mencken: Beauty and the Beast; Schwartz: Wicked  

Week 4  January 28  Contemporary Classics  
Simon and Norman: The Secret Garden; Guettel: The Light in the Piazza  
*Performance and Reception History assignment due in class*

Week 5  February 4  The Mini Musical: Intimate Affairs  
Brown: The Last Five Years; Tesori and Kron: Fun Home

Week 6  February 11  Mid-Term Examination

Week 7  February 25  Back to the Beginning: Operetta  
Gilbert and Sullivan: The Pirates of Penzance; Kern: Show Boat

Week 8  March 3  The Musical Play  
Rodgers and Hammerstein: Oklahoma!

Week 9  March 10  The Golden Era of Broadway  
Loesser: Guys and Dolls; Lerner and Loewe: My Fair Lady

Week 10  March 17  1957: A Turning Point  
Willson: The Music Man; Bernstein and Sondheim: West Side Story

Week 11  March 24  Sex, Drugs, and Rock Musicals  
Larson: Rent; Kitt and Yorkey: Next to Normal  
*Performance Review assignment due in class*

Week 12  March 31  Stephen Sondheim  
Sondheim: Sweeney Todd and Sunday in the Park with George
Assignment: Performance and Reception History (January 28)

Objectives:

To increase independent research skills by accessing historical materials in periodicals and databases. To assess musical theatre reviews 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. (Do not choose a musical from a different date that you prefer. I will randomly check ID to ensure this.) Write a performance and reception history of this musical.

Using any research tools you can (online newspaper databases, internet, books on musical theatre history, old entertainment magazines), learn about your show’s performance history, including any workshops, previews, original Broadway or Off-Broadway runs, major revivals, and possibly film versions. Note important members of the directorial team, designers, significant stars. Then, research the reception: what did critics have to say about the show in its various stages? What elements do the critics feel merit discussion and what language do they use to enliven their reviews? Some shows are very popular and will have numerous revivals; determine which are the most significant. Talking about three productions is ideal for this assignment.

Write a short paper describing what you have learned about this show and its history. You might consider whether the early critics had an impact on the show’s long term success, or if the critical reception to the show has changed over the show’s history. Include, at the end, 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. *There is no need to footnote your sources in this short paper; simply write the author’s name and the publication when you introduce a quote. Ex.: “Ben Brantley, in the New York Times, writes that…” After the first time introducing the author, you may then shorten to “Brantley writes” or include the last name in parentheses at the end of the sentence. Make sure that each source is included in the bibliography.

Formatting guidelines:

Approximately 800-1,000 words in a double-spaced, 12-point standard font (prefer Times New Roman). There is no need for a title page for this assignment; just include your identifying information on the top of the first page. Your sources page will be in addition to the word count.

Sources:

The New York Times is an absolute must! You may use the online version through the database ProQuest Historical Newspapers New York Times version. Ask for help at a campus library if you are not familiar with accessing or using this type of resource. Other useful sources could be The New Yorker or Variety magazines, 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 March 31)

Objective:
To apply what you have learned about musical theatre to a specific production, 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. How to determine if a production is a musical: Read the description on the theatre company’s website; look for author credits like composer and lyricist; phone or message the theatre company if you really confused.

Critique and comment on one element from each of the following three major areas:

1. Text (the immutable elements of a show such as story, music, lyrics)
2. Performance (the elements that change from one production to another: the direction or director’s concept, movement, the performances of specific actors)
3. Design (Visual and aural elements like costumes, sets and props, lighting, and sound)

Your review should answer the question “Is this good theatre?”

On show night, get to the theatre early enough to read the program. There may be program notes written by the director or a theatre scholar that could prove helpful in understanding the show or the directorial and design concept. If you can read a plot synopsis of the show before going, even better. Many theatre companies now include the program on their website, so you can do some advance reading.

Formatting guidelines:

1300-1400 words in a double-spaced, 12-point standard font (prefer Times New Roman). Include a title page with an interesting title that encapsulates your experience watching this musical; i.e., just the word *Cats* on your title page tells your reader nothing 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 ticket back in good condition for your scrapbook, you may photocopy the stub and include that instead.) If you have your tickets on your phone, simply print and attach the page. If you lost your ticket, attach a copy of the main page of the program.

*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

1. Who can take this course: It is your responsibility to find out if you may take this course for credit. Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enrol 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.

2. Plagiarism: Complete assignments independently. Submission of work with which you have received help from someone else (other than the course instructor or TA) is an example of plagiarism. Plagiarism is a major academic offence. Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following website: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

3. Accommodation on Medical or Compassionate Grounds:

Students are responsible for making up any missed classes or assignments as soon as possible. In order to ensure fairness and consistency for all students, academic accommodation for work representing more than 30% of the student’s overall grade in the course shall be granted only in those cases where there is documentation in the form of a completed and appropriately signed Student Medical Certificate (SMC) indicating that the student was seriously affected by illness and could not reasonably be expected to meet his/her academic responsibilities, or the equivalent documentation for non-medical or compassionate grounds.

Students seeking academic consideration must communicate with their instructors no later than 24 hours after the end of the period covered by either the self-reported absence or SMC, or immediately upon their return following a documented absence, to clarify how they will be expected to fulfil the academic expectations they may have missed during the absence. Documentation, if required, shall be submitted to the Office of the Associate Dean, Undergraduate (TC210) or the Associate Dean of your home faculty. Note that the new Self-Reporting Absence Portal may not be used for requesting academic relief for work worth more than 30%, or for Final Exams scheduled during the official examination period. Students are directed to read the full Senate policy on accommodation for medical illness at the following website: https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/Academic_Consideration_for_absences.pdf

A pdf copy of a Senate approved Student Medical Certificate (SMC) may be downloaded here: https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf

In cases where students miss work that is worth 30% or less of the total course grade due to medical illness or compassionate grounds, if an online absence report is submitted using the new Self-Reporting Absence Portal, or if documentation is voluntarily submitted to the Associate Dean’s office and the Associate Dean deems that accommodation is warranted, then the missed assignments or exams may be discounted in the calculation of the final grade for the course. If documentation is not submitted voluntarily then the missed assignment(s) or quiz(zes) will receive a grade of zero.

4. Students in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western https://www.uwo.ca/health/mental_wellbeing/ for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

5. Students may be excused to observe a religious holy day of their faith without penalty provided they notify the instructor in advance. Students are responsible for material covered in their absence and each student shall be permitted a reasonable amount of time to make up missed work.

6. Hand in assignments to the instructor at the beginning of class on the day for which the assignment is due. Acceptance of late assignments will be at the discretion of the instructor and only if extenuating circumstances prevail; otherwise late assignments will not be graded.