

Western University  
Don Wright Faculty of Music  
**Music 2701A: Musical Theatre, Fall 2020**

Instructor: Prof. Kristina Baron-Woods

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Meetings can take place via Zoom or FaceTime; please email or text to arrange appointment

Teaching Assistants:

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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 viewing, course readings, and forum discussion. 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 filmed performance.

**Evaluation:**

Reception History	Due Week 4	20%
Mid-term Examination	Week 7, Tuesday class time	25%
Topic check-in	Due before Week 10	3%
Performance Review	Due Week 11	22%
Participation	Throughout the term	5%
Final Examination	During exam period	25%

There is no textbook for this course. Course readings, musical examples, and video examples will be available online through the class OWL. Students will need access to filmed stage musicals for the Performance Review, as being able to attend live musicals is unlikely this year. There may be need to purchase a subscription to a streaming service like BroadwayHD in order to fulfill the assignment requirements.

## Course Schedule:

- Week 1**      **September 15**      **Introduction to the Course/Elements of Musical Theatre**  
Watch: Andrew Lloyd Webber: *Cats* (video on OWL). Discuss on forum.
- Week 2**      **September 22**      **The Mega Musical**  
Lecture: *Cats*; Schoenberg and Boublil: *Les Misérables*
- Week 3**      **September 29**      **Disney and Other Tales**  
Lecture: Ashman and Mencken: *Beauty and the Beast*; Schwartz: *Wicked*  
Read the article: Stacy Wolf, “Defying Gravity: Queer Convention in the Musical *Wicked*” in *Theatre Journal* Vol. 60/1 (2008). JSTOR database. Discuss on forum.
- Week 4**      **October 6**      **Classical and Contemporary**  
Lecture: Guettel: *The Light in the Piazza*. Watch video on OWL.  
**\*Reception History assignment due\***
- Week 5**      **October 13**      **The Mini Musical: Intimate Affairs**  
Lecture: Brown: *The Last Five Years*; Tesori and Kron: *Fun Home*
- Week 6**      **October 20**      **Sex, Drugs, and Rock Musicals**  
Lecture: Larson: *Rent*. Watch video on OWL.
- Week 7**      **October 27**      **Mid-Term Examination**
- Week 8**      **November 10**      **Back to the Beginning: Operetta**  
Lecture: Gilbert and Sullivan: *The Pirates of Penzance*; Kern: *Show Boat*. Watch Act 1 of *Pirates* video on OWL.
- Week 9**      **November 17**      **The Musical Play**  
Lecture: Rodgers and Hammerstein: *Oklahoma!* Watch video on OWL.  
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). JSTOR database. Discuss on forum.
- Week 10**      **November 24**      **The Golden Era of Broadway**  
Lecture: Loesser: *Guys and Dolls*  
**\*Topic check-in due\***
- Week 11**      **December 1**      **1957: A Turning Point**  
Lecture: Willson: *The Music Man*; Bernstein and Sondheim: *West Side Story*  
**\*Performance Review assignment due\***
- Week 12**      **December 8**      **Stephen Sondheim**  
Lecture: Sondheim: *Sweeney Todd* and *Sunday in the Park with George*

**Assignment: Reception History (Due Week 4, October 6, before 11:59pm) 20% of total grade**

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 musicals will be posted on the course OWL. Select one of the musicals that corresponds with the date of your birthday; i.e., my birthday is October 19, so I would choose ONE of the musicals corresponding to number 19 on the list. 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 origins, such as workshops or pre-Broadway runs (Off-Broadway or other cities). Find information about the original Broadway opening. Be sure to mention the creators - composers, lyricists, book writers, etc. Note important members of the directorial team, designers, significant stars. Then, research the reception: what did critics have to say about the show after its New York opening? What elements do the critics feel merit discussion and what language do they use to enliven their reviews?

Write a short paper describing what you have learned about this show's beginnings. Look at the reviews of critics from several news sources. Determine whether they seem to be uniform in their opinions of the musical overall or have chosen to highlight similar elements in their reviews. You might consider whether the early critics had an impact on the show's long term success, by looking at how long the show ran on Broadway or if it had any significant tours.

Include, at the end, a list of sources you used for your research, using Chicago Style for your citations. 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 you use is included in the bibliography. Refer to the guide on citing sources for music research papers posted on the course OWL.

Formatting guidelines:

Approximately 800-1,000 words in a double-spaced, 12-point standard font (prefer Times New Roman). Your sources page should not be included in the word count.

Sources:

*The New York Times* will be your best resource. Use the online version through the database ProQuest Historical Newspapers New York Times version. Other useful sources could be *The New Yorker* or *Variety* magazines, or any other major newspaper, preferably New York based. The Music Library also has a good selection of general musical theatre history books; you'll also find numerous online sources.

## **Performance Review (Due Week 11, December 1, before 11:59pm) 22% of total grade**

Objective:

To apply what you have learned about musical theatre to a specific production, to think critically about the theatre, and to enhance your own writing skills.

Directions:

Select a filmed stage musical from any source (YouTube, Netflix, BroadwayHD, etc.) and write a critical review in essay form. Try to choose a musical that is a filming of a live stage show rather than a movie adaptation of a musical. The goal is to replicate as closely as possible the experience of seeing the live version of a musical. If your show has a website that allows you to read the material that would have been a playbill (program), take the time to read it.

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, etc.)
2. Performance (the elements that change from one production to another: the direction or director's concept, movement, the performances of specific actors, etc.)
3. Design (Visual and aural elements like costumes, sets and props, lighting, and sound)

Your review should consider the question "Is this good theatre?"

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. Set your paper up as an essay with an introduction that gives a thesis and states the elements you are critiquing, body paragraphs that detail those elements, and a conclusion. While reading professional reviews from newspapers will help with the tone of your paper, please note that newspaper critics try to cover as much of a production as possible, with very little detail; you are doing the opposite - covering only a few elements in great detail.

## **Topic check-in (Due Week 10, November 24, before 11:59pm) 3% of total grade**

One week before your Performance Review is due, you must submit a short comment, stating what show you are using for your assignment. In this statement, give the show title, which production (company/date) you are reviewing, where you accessed this film, and what three elements you will be writing about. This will ensure that you start work on your review well before the due date, that you are clear about the elements you will be critiquing, and that I can offer assistance if it appears to be needed.

Directions on how to submit assignments will be posted on the Announcements page.

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

**Participation:**

Every week on Tuesday, discussion questions based on the week’s lecture or the week’s theme will be posted on the course OWL’s forum. Take a few minutes to respond to the questions or discuss other students’ responses. You will have until late night Friday to respond to that week’s discussion. Your grade will be derived from your level of engagement with the material. This is one area where everyone should get full marks.

A reminder about discussion forum manners – feel free to be critical of shows or songs, but make sure that your comments do not insult to those with differing views. Our different tastes are what make the discussion interesting.

## 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](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](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](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](mailto:MentalHealth@Western)

[https://www.uwo.ca/health/mental\\_wellbeing/](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.

Students shall inform the instructor at least two weeks before a scheduled exam if the exam falls on a religious holy day and an alternate date is required to write the exam.