

Western University
Don Wright Faculty of Music

Music 2701A: Musical Theatre, Fall 2021

Talbot College Room 141 Tuesdays, 7:00-10:00 p.m.

Instructor: Prof. Kristina Baron-Woods kbaron3@uwo.ca Office: Talbot College 324
Office hours: Tuesdays 3 - 5 p.m. drop in; other times via Zoom, by appointment

Teaching Assistants: Allahyar Vazirov avazirov@uwo.ca
Lydia Wilton lwilton5@uwo.ca

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 or filmed musical theatre performance.

Evaluation:

Reception History assignment	October 5th	15%
Midterm Examination	October 26th	25%
Topic Check-in	November 16th	5%
Performance Review	November 30th	25%
Participation	Throughout the term	5%
Final Exam	During December exam period	25%

There is no textbook for this course. Course readings (journal articles) and musical examples (songs) will be available online through the class OWL. For the Performance Review assignment, students will be required to either attend a live musical, if available, or to access to filmed stage musicals. You may wish to purchase a subscription to a streaming service like BroadwayHD to access professionally filmed stage musicals, or use YouTube. I will make you aware of as many options as possible in London and Toronto, but you may choose to see a performance elsewhere.

Course Schedule:

Week 1	September 14	Introduction to the Course/Elements of Musical Theatre
Week 2	September 21	The Mega Musical Lloyd Webber: <i>Cats</i> ; Schoenberg and Boublil: <i>Les Misérables</i>
Week 3	September 28	Disney and Other Tales Ashman and Mencken: <i>Beauty and the Beast</i> ; Schwartz: <i>Wicked</i> Read the article: Stacy Wolf, “Defying Gravity: Queer Convention in the Musical <i>Wicked</i> ” in <i>Theatre Journal</i> Vol. 60/1 (2008). In ProjectMUSE and JSTOR databases.
Week 4	October 5	Contemporary Classics Guettel: <i>The Light in the Piazza</i> *Reception History assignment due in class*
Week 5	October 12	The Mini Musical: Intimate Affairs Brown: <i>The Last Five Years</i> ; Tesori and Kron: <i>Fun Home</i>
Week 6	October 19	Sex, Drugs, and Rock Musicals Larson: <i>Rent</i> ; Kitt and Yorkey: <i>Next to Normal</i>
Week 7	October 26	*Mid-Term Examination*
Week 8	November 9	Back to the Beginning: Operetta Gilbert and Sullivan: <i>The Pirates of Penzance</i> ; Kern: <i>Show Boat</i>
Week 9	November 16	The Musical Play Rodgers and Hammerstein: <i>Oklahoma!</i> *Topic Check-in due via email by 11:59 p.m.*
Week 10	November 23	The Golden Era of Broadway Loesser: <i>Guys and Dolls</i>
Week 11	November 30	1957: A Turning Point Willson: <i>The Music Man</i> ; Bernstein and Sondheim: <i>West Side Story</i> *Performance Review assignment due in class*
Week 12	December 7	Stephen Sondheim Sondheim: <i>Sweeney Todd</i> and <i>Sunday in the Park with George</i>

Assignment: Reception History (October 5th; hard copy due at start of class) 15% 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 31 musicals will be posted on the course OWL. Select the musical that corresponds with the date of your birthday; e.g. my birthday is October 19th, so I would choose the 19th musical on the list. Write a performance and reception history of this musical.

Using any research tools you can, learn about your show's performance history, including any previews, original Broadway or Off-Broadway runs, major revivals, and film versions. Note important members of the creative team and significant stars. Then, research the reception: what did critics have to say about the show in its various stages? What elements appear to merit discussion in the various versions of the show? With shows that are very popular and have numerous revivals, determine which are the most significant. Talking about two or three different 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. On a separate page at the end, include a list of sources you consulted and cited, using the Chicago Manual of 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. Example: "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.

Formatting guidelines:

Approximately 1,000 words in a double-spaced, 12-point standard font. 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, including the excellent *The Complete Book of Broadway Musicals* (link posted on OWL).

Participation (After every class, to be posted before the next lecture) 5% of total grade

Every class day, discussion questions based on the lecture or theme of the class will be posted on the course OWL's forum. Attend lecture, watch any accompanying videos, and then take a few minutes to respond to the questions or discuss other students' responses. You will have until the next week's lecture to respond to that class's discussion. This will encourage you to keep up with your work on a regular basis and attend class. (Students who attend class tend to do better than those who just memorize the posted lecture notes.) Your grade will be derived from your level of engagement with the material. This is one area where everyone can potentially and should get full marks.

Note: I am not looking for you to repeat or summarize the lecture content; this is about your thoughts, opinions, and insights into the material. You may challenge thoughts, add your ideas, give a personal perspective. This does not need to be lengthy or taxing on your time.

I will give more direction on the *Wicked* discussion in that class's lecture.

Topic check-in (November 16th, before 11:59pm) 5% of total grade

Two weeks before your Performance Review is due, you must submit a short comment in paragraph or point form, stating what show you are using for your Review. In this statement, give the show title, where you accessed this film, or if you managed to see a live production, what production company or theatre. If you are lucky enough to have found a 'proshot' (professionally filmed and released), state that. If you have found a bootleg (filmed by an audience member at the live show), mention that. It may take some detective work to figure out the date the show was recorded, but do your best; you might only be able to give an approximate date range.

Explain what three elements you will be writing about, as per the Performance Review assignment (page 5 of the syllabus). Make sure that you are specific. Example: writing that you will focus on the lyrics, the actors' performances, and the costumes will get a comment that you need to be more specific and to resubmit. However, if you write that you will focus on the lyrics to one song that is particularly revealing of the lead character's motives, the vocal and acting performance of that character, and how the costumes depict the class difference between the lead and the ensemble, your check-in will be accepted.

This assignment ensures that you select a show and 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.

The Topic Check-in should be submitted directly to me via e-mail so that I can respond easily if you need further guidance.

Performance Review (November 30th; hard copy due at start of class) 25% of total grade

Objective:

To apply what you have learned about musicals in order to think critically about performance; become an active participant in the creation of the theatrical experience, and enhance your 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 plays will not be accepted for credit.

***OR**

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.

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?"

Read the show's 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 or viewing, 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. Include a title page with an interesting title that encapsulates your experience watching this musical; i.e., just the word *Hamilton* 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 have your tickets on your phone, simply print and attach the page.

*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.