

## Music 3 — American Music (American Musical Theater)

Spring 2013 @ 2A (Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:00-3:50 p.m.)

Faulkner Hall

Prof. Steve Swayne

### *General information*

This class looks at the history of American musical theater in the twentieth century. Our focus will be on works produced for the commercial stage in New York City, with a particular view toward how the American musical came to be, what influence it has played in American life, and how it reflects and challenges the time of its creation and re-creations. Our primary sources in our study will be the soundtracks for these musicals and videotapes of stage performances. The objective is to familiarize ourselves with a wide swath of repertoire so that we may have sharper skills to assess what makes musical theater effective not only as entertainment but also as a cultural marker and guidepost.

### *Texts and materials*

The required text is:

Larry Stempel, *Showtime: A History of the Broadway Musical Theater*

Some people whose names appear on the bibliography that will be on the course website will particularly assist us in learning more about American musical theater. Steven Suskin has compiled reviews of musicals from 1943 to 1981. Ethan Mordden has written voluminously and wittily about the musical. Gerald Bordman's *American Musical Theatre: A Chronicle* is a godsend for its exhaustive sweep, as is Richard Norton's even more comprehensive three-volume, 3,000pp. magnum opus, *A Chronology of American Musical Theater*.

### *Grades for the work in this course*

I will be grading you on both the amount of work you do for the class and the quality of that work. My intent is to give you all clear pathways to achieve the final grade you wish. Those who wish a higher grade will need to do more work at a higher critical level; those who are content with a lower grade may do less work and engage in less criticism.

All students will need to do the reading and viewing as assigned in the syllabus. In addition, students will work in teams to present their ideas on particular aspects of American musical theater in the final week of the course. Lastly, all students will need to listen to and read about other musicals throughout the course in order to raise their grade as follows:

C-level work: Listen to and read about one musical per week in addition to those explored in class. Critical engagement = low

B-level work: Listen to and read about two musicals per week in addition to those explored in class. Critical engagement = moderate

A-level work: Listen to and read about three musicals per week in addition to those explored in class. Critical engagement = high

Critical engagement entails drawing together the course readings and viewings with the external musicals and will be reflected in the weekly lab reports that you turn in. Low critical engagement would involve relying principally on easily retrievable information to augment your listening. High critical engagement would involve interacting with reviews, articles, and books about the musicals you have chosen as external musicals. In all cases, a summary lab report that synthesizes your engagement with the materials in this course is required at the end of the course.

While your output may vary from week to week, it is expected that students wishing to achieve higher grades will demonstrate consistency over the course of the term in their external work habits. No more than five external musicals in any given week will be accepted in your weekly lab reports.

An overall summary of grade weights for the course is:

Class presentation	25%
Peer evaluation	10%
Weekly lab reports	45%
Final lab report	10%
Class attendance and participation	10%

Students are expected to abide by the rules spelled out in “The Academic Honor Principle at Dartmouth College,” and you will be asked at the end of the term whether you have abided by the honor principle.

### *Some personal words*

The single most difficult aspect of studying music is that music is fundamentally an aural art. One cannot “speed up” hearing a piece; such an activity would distort both the piece and one’s understanding of the piece. Neither can studious listening be treated as a background activity that accompanies other tasks. Many, if not all, of these pieces may require more than one hearing for you to be able to remember them or to talk knowledgeably about them. The serious student will allocate both the necessary time and concentration not only to the reading but also to the listening.

Fundamental to this emphasis on listening is a *commitment* to remain attentive. Music in our society functions as a background activity; we are socialized to talk when we hear music. I have discovered that students often have a difficult time remaining attentive to listening, especially when examples are played in class. Because of this, I have adopted the following guidelines for in-class listening:

1. When music is played in class, it is expected that there will be no talking.
2. If there is talking while music is playing (or while a video is being viewed), I will stop the music and wait for the talking to cease.
3. If, when the music begins again, there continues to be talking, I will ask the parties who are talking to leave the room.
4. If any student is asked more than once to leave the room, I will meet with that student and counsel him/her to consider withdrawing from the class.

I recognize that this is a strong stance, but I know of no other way to stress the importance of *active attentive listening*, and I invite all students to engage in active, attentive listening with me.

My office is in the Hop down the narrow hallway near the entrance to Paddock Library; my regular office hours are Monday, Wednesday and Friday, 3-4:30 p.m. While I hope to be in my office during these times, it is best to contact me via BlitzMail before you drop by. If you are not available at any of these times, we can schedule an appointment that is mutually convenient. I will answer your BlitzMail in as timely a fashion as I can. And I encourage you to seek me out if you are having difficulty, if you encounter any physical, medical or psychiatric impediments to your learning, if you are having success, or if you just want to talk.

I am looking forward to learning with you.

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Dates	Topic	Reading assignment	Viewings	Papers and presentations
Week 1				
3/26	course introduction; genesis of American musical theater			
3/28	the archetypes (in film)	Stempel, introduction and ch. 4	<i>Singin' In The Rain</i> <i>Top Hat</i>	
Week 2				
4/2	from musical comedy to musical play	Stempel, ch. 8	<i>Oklahoma!</i> <i>Kiss Me, Kate</i>	
4/4				Lab report #1 due
Week 3				
4/9	how the American musical came to be	Stempel, chs. 4, 5 & 7	<i>Little Johnny Jones</i> <i>Show Boat</i>	
4/11				Lab report #2 due
Week 4				
4/16	the musical gets serious	Stempel, chs. 9 & 10	<i>Porgy and Bess</i> <i>Meet Me In St. Louis</i>	
4/18				Lab report #3 due
Week 5				
4/23	the musical hits the shoals	Stempel, chs. 11 & 13 (to p. 530)	<i>Gypsy</i> <i>Cabaret</i>	
4/25				Lab report #4 due

Date	Topic	Reading assignment	Viewings	Other assignments
Week 6				
4/30	the musical post-Vietnam	Stempel, chs. 6, 14 & 15	Chicago Dreamgirls	
5/2				Lab report #5 due
Week 7				
5/7	Sondheim	Stempel, ch. 13	Sweeney Todd Passion	
5/9				Lab report #6 due
Week 8				
5/14	the old musical returns as rock makes its case	Stempel, ch. 16	The Producers Hairspray	
5/16				Lab report #7 due
Week 9				
5/21	NO CLASS			
5/23	student presentations			Lab report #8 due
Week 10				
5/28	student presentations			Lab report #9 due
6/3 @ 11:30 A.M.				Final report due