

# It's A Hit! Tony Awards for Best Play and Best Musical

## Tony-Nominees and Tony-Winners of Broadway Plays and Musicals, 1948-2019

### ABSTRACT

This project analyzes data related to the Tony Awards for Broadway shows in the award categories of Best Play and Best Musical. Specifically, this project seeks to evaluate the popularity of these theatrical productions in relation to the prestigious industry award. Are Broadway musicals really more popular than plays? Are shows which were nominated for and won Tony Awards really more popular than their nominated, non-winning counterparts? How do these trends in popularity of Broadway plays and musicals shift over time?

### METHODS

To answer these questions, I examine the “runs,” or number of performances of shows as a proxy for evaluating the popularity of these shows. The data for this project, including opening and closing dates and number of performances for each show, is sourced from the Internet Broadway Database and the Broadway League.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

I compared the runs of plays and musicals from 1948 to 2019. My findings indicated that in nearly every year, musicals ran for more performances than plays. While Tony-nominated and Tony-winning plays were consistent in the number of performances over time, Tony-nominated and Tony-winning musicals showed greater variation in number of performances over time, with outliers clustered around the 1980s. There appeared a positive trend from the 1949 to the 1988 and a negative trend in length of musicals’ runs from the 1990s to the present (Appendix A).

A comparison of the number of performances by decades for plays versus musicals reflects historical trends in popularity of Broadway shows. Plays which opened in the 1960s and 1970s had the highest number of average performances in those decades and reflected trends of socially conscious theatre. Musicals which opened in the 1980s had the highest number of average performances in those decades and reflected trends of commercialized ‘mega-musicals’ (Appendix B).

Taken together, the data shows that Tony-nominated and Tony-winning musicals are, indeed, more popular, running for approximately 800 more performances than Tony-nominated and Tony-winning plays (Appendix C).

I also compared the runs of Tony-nominated versus Tony-winning shows in these two award categories. My findings indicated that, in most years, winning shows ran

longer than nominated, non-winning shows. In several years, however, Tony-nominated shows had a greater number of performance than their winning counterparts. In all of those years, the popular, Tony-nominated shows were all musicals (Appendix D).

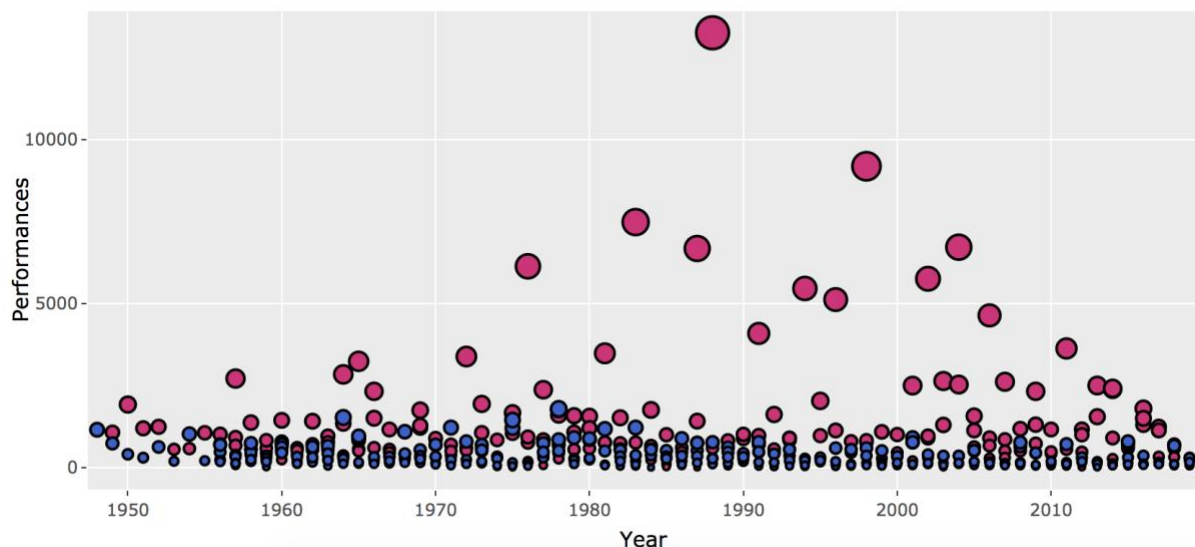
A comparison of the number of performances by decades for plays versus musicals reflects historical trends in popularity of Broadway shows. The data shows see a spike in the popularity of Tony-winning shows in the 1980s, reflecting the popularity of Tony-winning ‘mega-musicals’ which opened in the 80s and subsequent decline from the 1990s to the present. Tony-nominated shows peaked in popularity in the 2000s, reflecting the popularity of Disney and jukebox musicals, which were commercial hits but not the strongest candidates in those years to win the awards (Appendix E).

Taken together, the data shows that Tony-winning shows are, indeed, more popular than Tony-nominated shows which did not win the award, a consistent pattern for both play and musical categories (Appendix F).

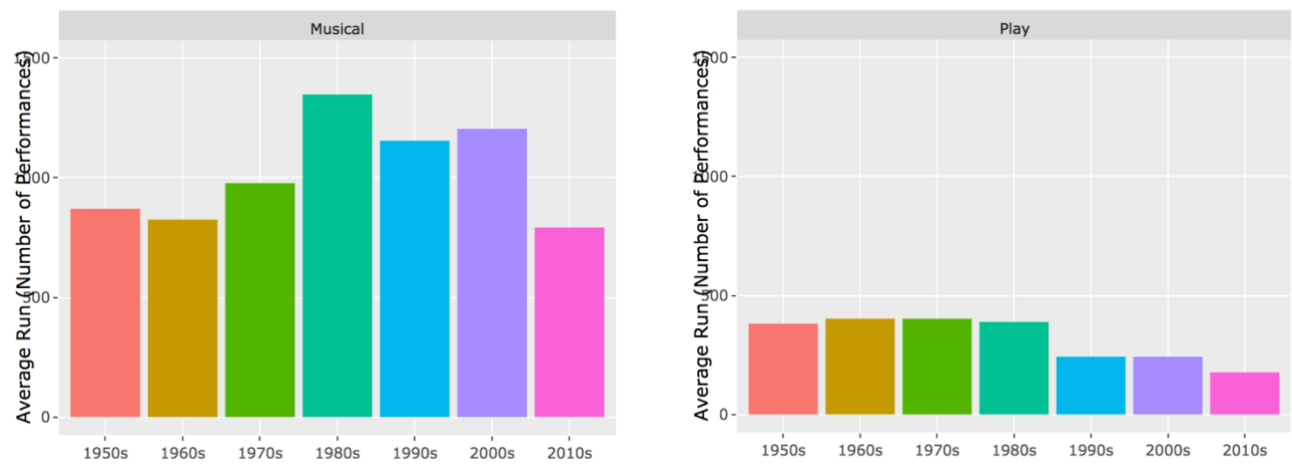
## APPENDIX A

### Runs of Plays versus Musicals by Year

Number of Performances of Tony-Nominated and Tony-Winning Plays versus Musicals



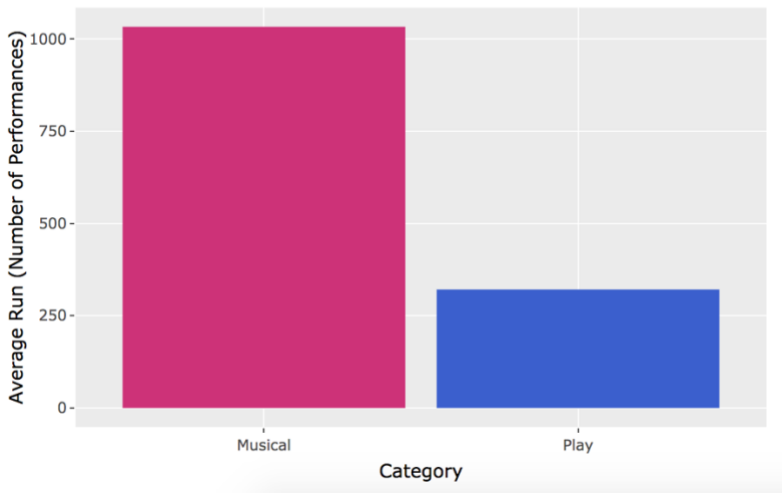
APPENDIX B



APPENDIX C

Average Number of Performances of Plays versus Musicals

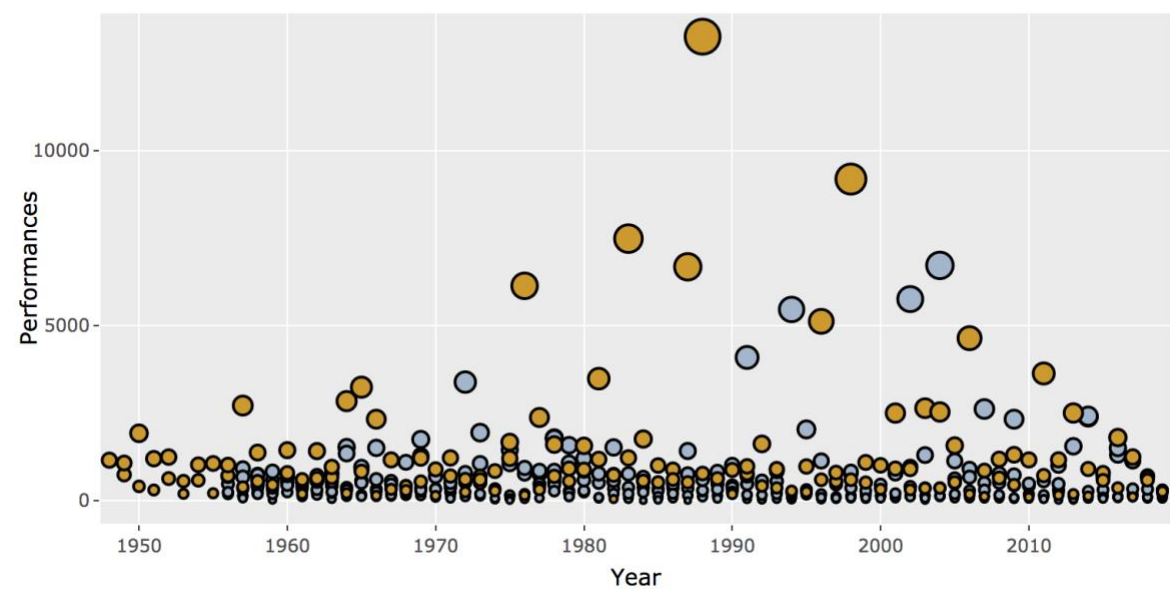
Tony-nominated musicals run, on average, for about 800 performances more than Tony-nominated plays.



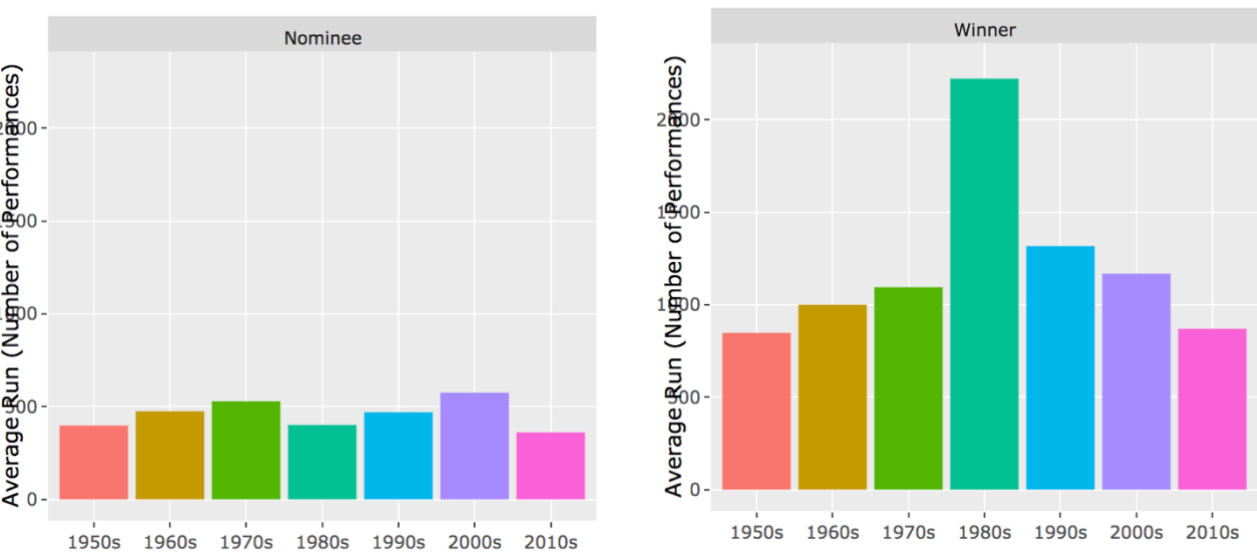
APPENDIX D

Runs of Award-Nominated versus Award-Winning Shows by Year

Number of Performances of Tony-Nominated versus Tony-Winning Plays and Musicals



APPENDIX E



APPENDIX F

