

T AR 441/541, History of Musical Theatre, Spring 2010

MWF 1:00-1:50 am, Harvill Bldg. room 318

Instructor: Dr. Christin Essin

Office: Drama Bldg. room 129B1 (hall across from directing studio)

Email: essin@email.arizona.edu Phone: 621-8756

Office Hours: MW 2:00-3:00, and by appointment

Course Description and Goals:

This course examines the history and contemporary artistry of musical theatre, with emphasis on the American stage during the twentieth century. Our investigation will acknowledge the ways in which musicals function as evidence of cultural history, providing insight into significant social, political, economic trends during the moments of their production. Rather than proceed chronologically through each decade, we will study specific musical librettos, productions, artists, and events as case studies that offer opportunities for detailed analysis. This course hits the high points of musical theatre history, but also teaches skills of analysis that help students approach musical texts and production practices as cultural artifacts. It is designed for students who acknowledge musical theatre (and popular culture in general) as a topic worthy of rigorous study and who want to explore the complexities of it with the same comprehensive attention typically given to classical/conventional topics of theatre history and literature.

The following are some of the overall objectives of the course:

- To acquire a working knowledge of the precedents, conventions, styles, texts, and people which constitute the history of musical theatre
- To think critically about the processes (and biases) involved in recording theatre history.
- To sharpen analytical skills through in-depth investigations of specific musical texts.
- To enhance skills in research, analysis, and communication through presentations, written assignments, and performed responses.

Required Texts:

- *Cabaret* by John Kander and Fred Ebb.
- *Gypsy* by Jule Styne.
- *South Pacific* by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II.
- *West Side Story* by Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim.
- *The Cradle Will Rock* by Marc Blitzstein.
- *Into the Woods* by Stephen Sondheim.
- Selections from *Wicked* by Stephen Schwartz and Winnie Holzman
- Additional readings posted on D2L

Required Performance: *Violet*, ART April 14-May 2

T AR 441/541, History of Musical Theatre, Spring 2010

D2L: The web component of this class is very important for getting up-to-date information. Ability to use D2L (Desire to Learn) and reliable access to it is a required component to this class. If you do not have a reliable computer and Internet connection, please make use of Campus Computing Resources: www.oscr.arizona.edu. Access the course website by logging onto D2L at www.d2l.arizona.edu and choosing T AR 603 from your *My Courses* menu. This syllabus, readings, assignments, and grades will be posted on the site. It is your responsibility to check the website and stay current with course activity.

Attendance and Tardiness:

This course follows the School of Theatre Arts attendance policy; each student is allowed three unexcused absences. Each subsequent unexcused absence will automatically lower the student's final grade by one-half of a letter grade. As per University policy, the following kinds of absences will always be excused:

- All holidays or special events observed by organized religions will be honored for those students who show affiliation with that particular religion.
- Absences pre-approved by the Dean of Students (or Dean's designee) will be honored.

Absences due to medical and family emergencies may be excused at the discretion of the professor. Students with three or more excused absences must contact the professor to plan the review of material missed during these absences. Lateness will severely affect your participation grade, and will likely affect assignment grades if absent during classroom activities. Three tardies equals one absence. A tardy will be marked for students arriving between 1 and 10 minutes after class has begun; after 10 minutes, the student will be marked as absent. Finally, students are responsible for material missed due to absence or tardiness.

Course Expectations:

I expect you to attend every scheduled class and always be on time, except in the case of emergencies and pre-approved situations. Additionally, I expect you to come to class having read each assignment closely, ready to ask questions and participate in discussion. I expect each of us to take responsibility for maintaining an active, enthusiastic, and respectful exchange of ideas. Because I expect a considerable amount of effort from students, I anticipate that you will expect an equal effort from me, anticipating a class that holds your interest, introduces you to new ideas, and encourages you to stretch your imagination. I will strive to engage you with my lectures, but realize that some of the material may not grab your attention straight away; *chase* to be curious about things that fall outside your immediate interests. Having acknowledged these expectations, I believe we will all rise to the challenge.

Assignments and Assessment:

Unless otherwise noted, all assignments are due at the beginning of class on the date listed. If you know ahead of time that you will be missing a class in which an assignment is due, it is your

T AR 441/541, History of Musical Theatre, Spring 2010

responsibility to: 1) email me in advance to outline the situation, 2) give me a hard copy of the assignment *before* the due date, 3) follow up to make sure I received the assignment.

***Late assignments will be deducted a full letter grade for each day they are missing. All late assignments should be time/date stamped in the main office of the School of Theatre Arts and placed in my mailbox.

***Students absent on a day they are scheduled to present a project will receive a "0" without documentation excusing the absence. (see Attendance policy for approved absences.)

A Quick Note on Group Projects: as theatre students, you are familiar with methods of collaboration and understand the importance of working as an ensemble; these group projects augment this element of your training. If someone is not pulling their weight in your group and you are unable to correct the situation, I need to know ASAP so I can help correct the situation. (I'm pretty good at this, actually, and I want each of you to have a positive learning experience.) The individual written components of these assignments (research report and analysis essay) will also showcase your particular viewpoints and contributions.

- 1. Team Teaching Facilitations:** In small groups of 5-6 students, you will facilitate a complete 50 minute class session on a chosen topic relating to our study of musical theatre analysis and history. Teams will decide how to divide the responsibilities of the facilitation, including presentation of material, development of handouts, performance of songs/scenes, coordination of technology (music, video, etc.), facilitation of discussion questions, etc. Each team will create a handout of information for the class, including a **timeline/chronology** of important people/events connected to your topic. Each team will also create a **bibliography**, including the sources used to develop your presentation materials, turned in to the instructor. Work diligently as a team to actively include all members in the facilitation, drawing from one another's strengths and developing material that showcases these strengths. Think creatively about methods of presentation; how can you actively engage the class in an examination and discussion of the material? It is expected that group members will meet **at least** twice outside of class to coordinate research and creative responsibilities.

In addition to collaborating with your teaching team, each individual member will write a separate research report examining one specific topic related to your teaching category. Reports will be 3-4 pages in length, and must be properly cited in MLA format, including a Works Cited page. The sources from your Works Cited can also be included in your team bibliography. All reports will be due the class period before your facilitation day. (Detailed assignment sheet to follow.)

A worksheet for recording your preferences is located in the appendix to the syllabus and must be turned in by Friday, Jan. 15th. Pay careful attention to performance dates

T AR 441/541, History of Musical Theatre, Spring 2010

and select preferences that fit your semester schedule. The following are the available team teaching categories:

- **Facilitation #1: Design for the Musical Stage, 2/26**
- **Facilitation #2: The Musical Flop, 3/12**
- **Facilitation #3: The Broadway Diva, 3/24**
- **Facilitation #4: New Musicals and the Musical Workshop, 4/2**
- **Facilitation #5: The Musical Revival, 4/16**

- 2. Group Performance Response:** In small groups of 5-6 students, (different from the teaching teams), you will present short performances based on additional research and analysis of one of the musical texts assigned for reading: *South Pacific*, *West Side Story*, *The Cradle Will Rock*, *Into the Woods*, and *Spring Awakening*. Groups will work collaboratively to translate their research and analysis into a short 15 minute performance response. Groups will perform their critique of the musical text and its historical context; i.e. you will use the medium of performance as a means to analyze the musical (performance as criticism). Your performed responses should be approached as workshops, more experimental than presentational in tone, with attention given to process over product. Following your performance, your group will participate in a class discussion about the musical, your interpretation/analysis of the text, and its cultural relevance. It is expected that group members will meet initially two weeks before their class performance and **at least** two other times outside of class to coordinate research and creative responsibilities. Kevin Becerra will serve as your point person for this assignment, answering questions and providing feedback; he will also facilitate the discussion following your performance. Elect one group member to liaison with Kevin and keep him updated on your progress.

In addition to collaborating with your performance group, each individual member will write a separate analysis essay interprets the cultural relevance of the musical explored by your group through a close reading of its score and libretto. Essays will be 3-4 pages in length; the only source needed for your essay is the musical text, but if you decide to include additional research, use MLA format for citations. All reports will be due the class period *before* your performance day. (Detailed assignment sheet to follow.)

Performance groups will be assigned according to preferences. As noted with the facilitations, pay careful attention to dates and select preferences that fit your semester schedule (refer to the worksheet in the appendix). Performance dates are as follows:

- **Group #1, *South Pacific*, performing on 2/22**
- **Group #2, *West Side Story*, performing on 3/8**
- **Group #3, *The Cradle Will Rock*, performing on 3/29**

T AR 441/541, History of Musical Theatre, Spring 2010

- **Group #4, *Into the Woods*, performing on 4/12**
 - **Group #5, *Spring Awakening*, performing on 4/26**
- 3. Midterm and Final Exams:** You will take two exams this semester, a mid-term and final. The final exam will be cumulative only in that it will test the continuing development of the course's broad trajectories and concepts, but it primarily will cover the material studied since the mid-term. Exams are distributed in a take-home format and typically include short answer and essay questions to be answered from lecture notes, class discussion, and reading material (no outside research is necessary or desired). Distribution and due dates are noted in the course schedule; students must work independently and have a week to complete the exams.
- 4. Quizzes and Participation:** This is a participatory course; you need to be present, prepared, and actively involved. Students are expected to participate in class discussions and contribute to a vibrant and thoughtful classroom environment. Read assignments in advance and prepare preliminary thoughts, questions, and responses. You will be asked to respond periodically to our various reading assignments and classroom discussions. Some classes will begin with a 5-10 minute writing exercise that asks students to respond to a musical text, essay, etc. These responses/quizzes are designed to encourage students to remain up-to-date on course material so we can maintain a vibrant classroom discussion.

Grading:

Team Teaching Facilitation	25% (15% facilitation; 10% research report)
Group Performance Response	25% (15% performance; 10% analysis essay)
Midterm Exam	15%
Final Exam	20%
Participation and Quizzes	15%
Total	100%

Course Calendar

Week 1: Introductions

W	1/13	Class Introduction
F	1/15	Video, <i>Broadway: The American Musical</i> In-class Assignment: Historicizing the American Musical worksheet

Week 2: Approaches

M	1/18	MLK, Jr. Holiday/No Class
W	1/20	Studying Popular Culture: History and Analysis
F	1/22	Analyzing the Musical Text: Libretto

T AR 441/541, History of Musical Theatre, Spring 2010

Week 3: Musical Analysis

M	1/25	Analyzing the Musical Text: Score and Lyrics
W	1/27	Case Study in Analysis: <i>Cabaret</i>
F	1/29	Analyzing the Musical Production: From Page to Stage

Week 4: Musical Precursors

M	2/1	Musicals as Cultural History/Criticism
W	2/3	Minstrelsy and Tin Pan Alley
F	2/5	Revues and Operettas

Week 5: Vaudeville in Perspective

M	2/8	Vaudeville and Burlesque
W	2/10	U of A Special Collections: The Vaudeville Artifact
F	2/12	Case Study in History: <i>Gypsy</i>

Week 6: The Integrated Musical

M	2/15	The Integrated Musical
W	2/17	<i>Showboat</i> and <i>Porgy and Bess</i>
F	2/19	Rodgers and Hammerstein

Week 7: The Integrated Musical, cont.

M	2/22	Group Performance #1: <i>South Pacific</i>
W	2/24	Race and the American Musical
F	2/26	Team Facilitation #1: Design for the Musical Stage Midterm Exam distributed (covering material through Week 7)

Week 8: Musical Development and Production

M	3/1	Composers and Lyricists
W	3/3	Choreography for the Musical Stage
F	3/5	Directing for the Musical Stage DUE: Midterm Exam

Week 9:

M	3/8	Group Performance #2: <i>West Side Story</i>
W	3/10	Ethnicity and the American Musical
F	3/12	Team Facilitation #2: The Musical Flop

3/13-3/21: Spring Break/No Class

T AR 441/541, History of Musical Theatre, Spring 2010

Week 10:

M	3/22	The Hollywood Musical: Early Years
W	3/24	Team Facilitation #3: The Broadway Diva
F	3/26	Musical Performers

Week 11: Politics and the Musical Stage

M	3/29	Group Performance #3: <i>The Cradle Will Rock</i>
W	3/31	National Politics and the Musical Stage
F	4/2	Team Facilitation #4: New Musicals and the Musical Workshop

Week 12:

M	4/5	Guest Lecture: Megan Gogerty
W	4/7	The Rock Musical
F	4/9	Stephen Sondheim

Week 13:

M	4/12	Group Performance #4: <i>Into the Woods</i>
W	4/14	The Musical as Adapted Narrative
F	4/16	Team Facilitation #5: The Musical Revival

Week 14:

M	4/19	Spectacle Musicals and the British Invasion
W	4/21	The Hollywood Musical: Later Years
F	4/23	The Television Musical

Week 15:

M	4/26	Group Performance #5: <i>Wicked</i>
W	4/28	Gender and Sexuality on the Musical Stage
F	4/30	Genealogies of Musical Theatre: The Past, Present, and Future Final Exam distributed (covering material from Week 8 through Week 15)

Week 16: Finale

M	5/3	Production Discussion: ART's <i>Violet</i>
W	5/5	Final Thoughts and Course Evaluations
M	5/10	DUE: Final Exam by 5:00pm (turn in to my mailbox in the office of the School of Theatre Arts)