

## **THE 2001 American Musical Theatre History**

Fall 2025: T 3:00-3:50/TH 3:00-4:55; Williamson Hall 0202

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### **Course Description:**

In this course, participants will investigate the history of American Musical Theatre through music, choreography, acting, directing, and design over a century of performance.

### **Course Goals/Learning Outcomes:**

The overall objective of this course is to provide you with the historical knowledge that is foundational to analyzing and approaching a musical theatre script and score. Upon completion of the course, you will be able to demonstrate:

- An understanding of the historical contexts that have shaped the American Musical Theatre as an art form, and in turn, the ways in which American Musical Theatre has shaped popular culture in the 20th and 21st centuries.
- Facility in discussing major musical theatre works and musical theatre artists/practitioners, and in situating these works within their historical context.
- Familiarity with a variety of musical theatre works, including those from composers, lyricists, choreographers and designers.
- The ability to think, read and write critically to build a sound vision for production and performance choices.

### **Required Course Materials:**

#### **Musicals (view/listen)**

Links will be provided

#### **Chapters/Articles Selections:**

Will be provided on Canvas

### **Course Requirements and Expectations:**

Attendance Policy: Students are responsible for satisfying all academic objectives as defined by the instructor. Absences count from the first class meeting. You have three “free” absences for this course. These do not require documentation. Any absence that is not “free” or excused with official acceptable documentation (see list below), will result in

a deduction to your final grade. University-approved excused absences for the following reasons must be supported by official acceptable documentation to avoid a grade penalty:

- Illness – doctor’s note
- Serious family emergencies
- Special curricular requirements (e.g., judging trips, field trips, professional conferences)
- Military obligation
- Severe weather conditions
- Participation in official university activities such as music performances, athletic competition or debate
- Court-imposed legal obligations (e.g., jury duty or subpoena)

To help organize accommodations, students should inform the instructor by the end of the second week of classes of religious observances of their faith that will conflict with class attendance this semester.

**Make-up Day:** Things happen. There is one “Make Up Day” listed on the schedule. You may submit up to two missed/late assignments on OR BEFORE Make Up Day for up to full credit. Any additional assignments submitted on Make Up Day will be considered for up to half credit.

**Participation** (20%) is required. Discussion and on-our-feet activities will be an integral part of our class meetings, and the extent to which you participate will impact your grade. We're here to learn from each other and your meaningful contributions to discussion and active engagement makes for a fun class! Please come to class prepared, having read/completed the daily assignments.

Rubric for Assessing Student Participation

	Exemplary (90%- 100%)	Proficient (80%- 90%)	Developing (70%- 80%)	Unacceptable (<70%)
Frequency of participation in class	Student initiates contributions more than once in each class meeting. Student is not multitasking on a computer, phone, or other	Student initiates contribution once in each class meeting. Student is not multitasking on a computer, phone, or other device (other	Student initiates contribution at least in half of the class meetings. Student is focused on computer/phone on tasks	Student does not initiate contribution & needs instructor to solicit input. Student is focused on computer/phone on tasks

	device (other than to take notes relevant to the course)	than to take notes relevant to the course)	unrelated to class	unrelated to class
Quality of comments	Comments always insightful & constructive; uses appropriate terminology. Comments balanced between general impressions, opinions & specific, thoughtful criticisms or contributions. Student is not multitasking on a computer, phone, or other device (other than to take notes relevant to the course)	Comments mostly insightful & constructive; mostly uses appropriate terminology. Occasionally comments are too general or not relevant to the discussion. Student is not multitasking on a computer, phone, or other device (other than to take notes relevant to the course)	Comments are sometimes constructive, with occasional signs of insight. Student does not use appropriate terminology; comments not always relevant to the discussion. Student is focused on computer/phone on tasks unrelated to class	Comments are uninformative, lacking in appropriate terminology. Heavy reliance on opinion & personal taste, e.g., "I love it", "I hate it", "It's bad" etc. Student is focused on computer/phone on tasks unrelated to class
Listening Skills	Student listens attentively when others comment, present materials, perspectives, as indicated by comments that build on others' remarks, i.e., student hears what others say &	Student is mostly attentive when others comment, present ideas, materials, as indicated by comments that reflect & build on others' remarks. Occasionally needs encouragement	Student is focused on computer/phone on tasks unrelated to class	Does not listen to others; detracts from discussion. Student is focused on computer/phone on tasks unrelated to class

	contributes to the dialogue. Student is not multitasking on a computer, phone, or other device (other than to take notes relevant to the course)	or reminder of focus of comment. Student is not multitasking on a computer, phone, or other device (other than to take notes relevant to the course)		

**Read (or View or Listen) and Respond (20%):** Over the course of the semester, you will read/watch/listen to various materials. The listed readings/viewings/listening are required and you should be prepared to engage in discussion about each of them. Some will require you to submit a short essay response, or a list of bullet points for discussion. Others will ask you to comment directly in Perusall and engage with your colleagues. Specific guidelines for each Read & Respond will be posted to Canvas, but bear in mind that you will be graded on your demonstration of an understanding of the concepts we are studying. Are you analyzing and synthesizing ideas? Are you covering the important points? Making a thoughtful and meaningful contribution that can inform our group discussion?

**Team Presentation (20%):** Over the course of the semester, teams will present on a musical(s), or composer, lyricist, choreographer or designer that has been influenced by or has had significant impact on the field in relation to the material we will be exploring that week. A list of potential presentation topics will be provided to get you thinking, but you are welcome to propose a topic beyond what the list offers. Specific guidelines and a grading rubric will be posted on Canvas.

**Two Quizzes (20%)** There will be two in-class quizzes, one at the midterm and one near the end of the semester, that will consist of short answer, essay, and a listening portion. There will be a review before each quiz and you will have the entire class period to complete it.

**Final Project (20%)** The final project is comprised of two parts: Creative Fun Fabulous Presentation Component (10%): As part of a group, you will present a short creative performance piece in response to a work(s) that we have NOT had the opportunity to study deeply this semester but that you find is strongly connected to the concepts we have covered. Your piece will demonstrate your understanding of the historical context of the work(s), its relevance to contemporary musical theatre, and a critical lens through which

we have approached its study. (Groups will be formed based on compatible interest in particular work(s)). Specific guidelines and a grading rubric will be posted to Canvas. Final Paper Component (10%): Paper: In this 750 to 1000-word analytical paper, you will research two musicals, musical theatre artists or practitioners from two different time periods and engage in a critical comparison of the two. What knowledge have you gained this semester that might inform your topic in addition to the scholarly sources that you will use? Specific guidelines and a grading rubric will be posted to Canvas.

### Grading Scale:

For information on how UF assigns grade points, visit:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academicregulations/grades-grading-policies/> A 94-100 A- 90-93 B+ 87-89 B 84-86 B- 80-83 C+ 77-79 C 74-76 C- 70-73 D+ 67-69 D 64-66 D- 60-63 F <60

**Course Schedule** (all assignments are listed on date **DUE**. This schedule is subject to change).

### Week 1:

Thursday, August 21

#### **Asynchronous Assignment (no in-person class meeting)**

In our Canvas discussion board, reply to the post “MFM: My Favorite Musical.” Tell us a bit about your current favorite, and at least three specific reasons why

### Week 2:

Tuesday, August 26

Introductions

Course Map; Building a Shared Vocabulary

MFM Review

Thursday, August 28

#### **Asynchronous**

What is a Musical Tools for Analysis

Read/Watch: “Elements of the Musical” (PBS essay). [PBS](#)

“Musicals” (LoC overview + playlist). [The Library of Congress](#)

Activity: “Number Clinic.” In groups of 4, classify 6 short clips by function and justify choices on a shared slide.

### Week 3:

Tuesday, September 2

Early Broadway and the Birth of the American Musical

Thursday, September 4

**Read & Watch:**Block, Geoffrey. *Enchanted Evenings: The Broadway Musical from Show Boat to Sondheim and Lloyd Webber*. Chapter 1: “Musical Theatre in New York before Show Boat”; Kenrick, John. *Musical Theatre: A History*. Chapter 7: “The Birth of Broadway” **Viewing:** Selections from *The Merry*

*Widow* (1905 operetta) – [YouTube link to Vienna Philharmonic staging](#); Selections from *Shuffle Along* (1921) for its musical innovations – Library of Congress clip; Archival images of early Broadway theaters – Shubert Archive Digital Collection

**Week 4:**

Tuesday, September 9

Thursday, September 11

Operetta aesthetics; Ziegfeld logics; star systems

Case studies with artifacts

Read/Watch:

PBS essay: “Operetta” and Americanization. [PBS](#)

LoC recordings playlist selections (Weber & Fields; *It Happened in Nordland* excerpts). [The Library of Congress](#)

Activity: “Bill the Bill.” Groups assemble a 1915 revue bill (5 numbers) from LoC audio/notes and write a 150-word curator note connecting immigrant musics to audience taste.

Due: Show File #1 — 1-page analysis of a pre-1920 primary source (image, recording, or review) with citation.

**Week 5:**

Tuesday, September 16

Thursday, September 18

1920s Innovations; economics of touring and revivals

Listening lab: syncopation, song forms, dance.

Read/Watch:

LoC playlist items by Eubie Blake (*Bandana Days*, *Baltimore Buzz*). [The Library of Congress](#)

PBS timeline 1904–1919 and 1920s context. [PBS+1](#)

Activity: “Rhythm to Stage.” In trios, map one recorded song’s form to a hypothetical staging (entrances, choreography cues).

**Week 6:**

Tuesday, September 23

Thursday, September 25

*Show Boat*

Archival deep dive + film vs. stage.

Read/Watch:

LoC National Recording Registry essay on *Show Boat* (Robeson/Morgan recordings). [The Library of Congress](#)

LoC film essay on *Show Boat* (1936). [The Library of Congress](#)

LoC catalog entry + exhibition materials. [The Library of Congress](#)

**Activity:** “Page to Stage to Screen.” Jigsaw groups compare a recording, a film scene, and production notes; 5-min lightning shares.

**Week 7:**

Tuesday, September 30

Thursday, October 2

*Oklahoma!* as template; dance dramaturgy.

Staging lab: What makes an “I-want” number work?

**Read/Watch:** LoC *Oklahoma!* essays (original cast recording;

film). [The Library of Congress+2](#)[The Library of Congress+2](#); LoC video short: “Rodgers & Hammerstein: Introduction & *Oklahoma!*.” [The Library of Congress](#)

**Activity:** “I-Want, I-Need.” Groups script a 30-second beat-sheet for a new I-want number; one volunteer performs talk-sing.

**Week 8:**

Tuesday, October 7

Thursday, October 9

Collaborations; the city as choreography.

Archive workshop with LoC “Birth of a Classic” site; score/choreo interplay.

**Read/Watch:** LoC West Side Story exhibition (notes, sketches, set designs). [The Library of Congress+1](#); LoC essay on original cast recording. [The Library of Congress](#)

**Activity:** “From Scribble to Stage.” Small teams annotate Robbins’s choreo notes vs. Bernstein’s sketches; present one ‘aha’ where movement altered music.

**Week 9:**

Tuesday, October 14

Thursday, October 16

From *Company* to *Sweeney Todd*: concept, fragmentation, character interiority.

Team timeline briefings (10 min each) tracing 1943–1979 through one lens (technology, labor, critics, dance vocabularies, casting).

**Read/Watch:** American Masters: full Sondheim interviews (transcripts; selected clips). [PBS+1](#); New Yorker (contextual criticism on Sondheim’s style). [The New Yorker](#)

**Activity (Tue):** “Song as Argument.” Close-read one Sondheim lyric for rhetorical structure; 2-min micro-presentations.

**Due :** Show File #2 — Annotated discography (4 tracks, 1950–1979) with 75-word notes on orchestration & lyric craft.

**Week 10:**

Tuesday October 21

Thursday, October 23

*Hair*, *A Chorus Line*, globalization, marketing.

Documentary clips & reception study.

**Watch/Read:** *A Chorus Line* process (documentary trailer/featurettes; discussion of audition culture). (Use in class; instructor-provided clips; contextualize with PBS Broadway site timelines.) [PBS](#); PBS essays on Broadway’s 1970s economic/cultural shifts. [PBS](#)

**Activity:** “Oral-History Speed Round.” Students collect a 60-second audio from a peer about audition/rehearsal experiences; synthesize themes on the board.

**Week 11:**

Tuesday, October 28

Jonathan Larson and the nonprofit/commercial ecosystem

Thursday, October 30

Case lab: *Rent*; marketing.

**Read/Watch:** PBS Broadway timelines (1980s–2000s). [PBS](#); Smithsonian/LoC on entertainment as national discourse (for exhibit framing). [National Museum of American HistorySmithsonian Institution](#)

**Activity:** “Paratext Pitch.” Teams rewrite a 1996 *Rent* press release; justify three concrete changes.

**Due:** Final Project 1-page proposal + preliminary sources.

## Week 12:

Tuesday, November 4

*In the Heights*: community, place, and flow; doc as process.

Thursday, November 6

### Asynchronous Assignment

*Hamilton*—history, casting, public humanities.

**Watch/Read:** PBS Great Performances: *In the Heights*: *Chasing Broadway Dreams* (article + preview; selected clips available). [PBS+1Thirteen](#); Great Performances “Hamilton’s America” materials & clips. [PBS+1WETA](#)

**Activity:** “Flow & Function.” In pods of 5, scan-read a rap verse from *Hamilton* and mark internal rhyme/stress; map to character objective; 90-sec share-outs.

## Week 13:

Tuesday, November 11

New-work development, authorship

Thursday, November 13

Performance analysis & awards discourse.

**Watch/Read:** Tony Awards page + official performance clip(s) for *A Strange Loop* (view in class; link hub for students). [Tony AwardsYouTube](#); Coverage of *A Strange Loop*’s Tony wins (context). [EW.com](#); NPR Tiny Desk (Hedestown) as model of folk-operatic idioms in contemporary MT. [YouTube](#)

**Activity:** “What’s ‘New’ About It?” Groups choose one element (form, orchestration, address to audience, authorship) and show how it departs from Golden-Age norms.

**Due:** Show File #3 — 2-page performance analysis of a 2010s/2020s number (staging, text, and context).

## Week 14:

Tuesday, November 18

Unions, contracts, casting practices; the critic’s voice.

Thursday, November 20

Field-trip framing: museums as MT historians (virtual exhibit)

**Read/Explore:** Smithsonian NMAH “Entertainment Nation” (online overview + press info). [National Museum of American](#)



[HistorySmithsonian Institution](#); NMAH visiting page (for optional in-person visit or virtual discussion). [National Museum of American History](#)

**Activity:** “Curator for a Day.” Each team curates a micro-exhibit (3 artifacts: image, audio, text) on a labor topic; 1-page label set.

**Week 15:**

Tuesday, November 25

**No class – Thanksgiving Holiday**

Thursday, November 27

**No class – Thanksgiving Holiday**

**Week 16:**

Tuesday, December 2

Student lightning talks (3 minutes, 1 slide) — findings from final projects.

In-class colloquium: demos, excerpts, or critical provocations; course reflection circle.

Thursday, December 12

Final Papers Due