

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

A CRITICAL THEORY OF THE MUSICAL THEATRE:

With specific reference to shows
from the period 1957 - 1989

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on

A CRITICAL THEORY OF THE MUSICAL THEATRE:

with specific reference to shows
from the period 1957 - 1989

Abstract of Thesis

An examination of the modern musical

Placing the musical theatre in the context of its most recent developments, between 1957 and 1989, the study begins by aiming to define the term, 'musical theatre', and notes the lack of serious critical attention paid to it. In the succeeding four chapters, the author constructs a basic model for critical analysis of musicals, rooted firmly in dramatic principles, not musical ones. He also examines:

- a) the inherent expressive qualities of its four basic media and their dramatic functions;
- b) the traditions and conventions which have developed to give theatrical life and dramatic significance to the form;
- c) questions of style as related to the musical,

and, most importantly;

- d) the principles and process of synthesis, which, he argues, creates a new language of the musical and gives it its place as art.

In the second part of the thesis, the author examines shows from the set period in relation to the four variables of his analytical model:

- i) the ideas artists want to express
- ii) the discovered devices of creation
- iii) the mechanics of presentation
- iv) public and critical response.

By this means he explores the expressive range of the musical's recent history and its potential which continues to attract artists and audiences alike.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
SUMMARY	
Abstract of Thesis	(i)
CONTENTS	(ii)
PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	(v)
INTRODUCTION	(viii)
 CHAPTER 1 IN SEARCH OF A GENRE	 1
Towards a Definition	1
 CHAPTER 2 READING THE MUSICAL	 32
Building A Model For Analysis	32
The Musical As Theatrical Entity	34
Theatrical Antecedents To The Musical	36
The Process Of Artistic Selection	41
The Musical Theatre Artist	58
Dramatic Structure In The Musical	60
The Interpretive Process	63
Affecting The Audience	66
The Musical Theatre Spectrum	67
Artistic Polarities	72
Searching For Evidence	79
 CHAPTER 3 THE MEDIA OF THE MUSICAL	 87
The Foundations Of Dramatic Synthesis	87
Words	89
Music	94
Dance	102
Design	109
The Heart Of Dramatic Synthesis In The Musical Theatre	115
 CHAPTER 4 CONVENTION AND TRADITION	 127
<u>The Convention & Principles Of Musical Theatre Song</u>	136
1. Musical Form	136
2. Lyrics	139
3. The Marrying Of Music And Lyric	146
4. Song Types	149
a) The Ballad	150
b) The Rhythm Song	151
c) The Comedy Song	152
d) The Charm Song	154
e) The Musical Scene	155
f) Special Material	156

<u>Other Conventions</u>		
Non-Vocal Musical Conventions		161
The Chorus		170
Conventions Of Setting		174
The Orchestra		177
<u>Discovering Convention</u>		185
CHAPTER 5	A QUESTION OF STYLE	189
Dramatic Style		199
Genre In The Musical Theatre		204
The Musical As Comedy		209
Theatricalism As Style		217
CHAPTER 6	A VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS - THE VOICE OF THE MUSICAL	225
A Moral Theatre		228
A Romantic Theatre		235
Ideas and Issues		243
Modernism And The Musical		245
CHAPTER 7	BUILDING BLOCKS - THE FORM OF THE MUSICAL	276
Considerations of Character.		277
Character archetypes and their use.		283
i) The Hero		283
ii) The Heroine.		292
iii) The Villain.		298
iv) The Confidant(e).		302
Other Considerations.		307
Dramatic Structures - A Rhythmic Skeleton.		309
Longer Lines.		320
A History Of Adaptation.		329
Originality		337
CHAPTER 8	THE INFERNAL MACHINE - THE WORKINGS OF THE MUSICAL	341
People or Puppets?		342
Directing the Musical		360
Dance and design as presentational synthesis.		368
Creator and Interpreter		376
Producing The Musical		385

CHAPTER 9	HOLD UP THE MIRROR - THE FUNCTION OF THE MUSICAL	400
	Another Opening, Another Show...	400
	The Word Is Law...	402
	A Kind Of Mirror.	410
APPENDIX A	THE SUB-GENRES OF PAUL J. HUSTOLES	431
	Musical Comedy	433
	Musical Farce	435
	Musical Comedy Of Manners	437
	Musical Drama	439
	Musical Melodrama	441
	Musical Revue	445
BIBLIOGRAPHY		448

PREFACE

This preface must begin as if it were a confession, for I fell into research almost by accident as a result of preparing a dissertation on the work of Stephen Sondheim for my undergraduate final examination. As I completed it, I had the unerring sense not only that the piece was somewhat naïve in both its approach and content, - though the examiners fortunately didn't agree with that! - but also that I had scratched the surface of something much larger than I had ever imagined, for it left me with all sorts of unanswered questions about the musical theatre in general and about its current state of health both in the U.K., and abroad.

Many of these questions had first been sensed during a youthful love of musicals which had developed in me from as far back as I can remember. This in turn led me into what I have since discovered to be the cultish approach to musicals; an attitude of the musical theatre buffs whose major interest in the form centres on 'who is the first to get the original cast recording of a show', or 'who has the most esoteric piece of knowledge concerning the musical theatre with which to impress other buffs'. Such an attitude is harmless enough as a social game, but of great danger should it ever be taken for serious criticism. Yet, seemingly, and all too frequently, it is, for there exists in the world of the musical a tendency for deception by hype. As art forms go, the musical scores high on the 'Emperor's New Clothes' scale!

What became clear to me in commencing my research was how vital was the interplay between serious scholarship and artistry in the field. For me, the mutual benefit between my study and my creative work as musical dramatist/director was immediately evident and the two seem naturally to fulfil each other. Imagine then, my surprise, not to say horror, as I began to work with more and more professionals in all aspects of musical theatre, to discover not only their suspicion of academic study of the musical, which I understood even as I decried it, but also their complete lack of any real understanding of their own crafts or of a working vocabulary, akin to that which everyone in the non-musical theatre learns and uses as part of their basic training.

Such a situation, coupled with my developing knowledge through my study, led me to the foundation of the Musical Theatre Workshop, which hopefully has already begun to fill some of the gaps in training for musical theatre artists at all levels - professional, student and amateur. What also quickly became clear was that this one study was still in many respects likely to prove inadequate in covering the ground as thoroughly as I might wish, and that there is still room for much more research.

What will become very clear from this study is just what a huge and complex form the musical is, and hence why critics have all too often shied away from it, frequently hiding behind lame excuses aimed at the form's potential weaknesses. Certainly, the original intention of this study, which was to examine in detail shows from the set period had to be abandoned half-way through the research period, for it became clear that there existed no satisfactory model for analysis, no context for the kind of discussion I had envisaged. Therefore, the first half of the study had to be given over to an attempt to create such a model, one which will no doubt be challenged, but will respond to further thought and development, even as it provides a grounding for the second half of this study. The latter part attempts to summarise the work that was originally intended as the main body of the study, and as such may appear somewhat cursory. Clearly it was not possible, given constrictions of time and space to cover the ground as thoroughly as I would have liked, but again it breaks the surface. There was not, in the end, room to talk at length on the mechanics of synthesis and specific methods of unification which the different media employ, for example. That subject would make a book in itself and is most crucial to dramatists and directors in the musical theatre who must aim to understand the workings of the whole.

Certainly I aim to continue my own research into the field, both through academic study and publishing, and through creative work in the form. In addition, I hope to try to fill at least some of the training gaps in the U.K., with regard to musical theatre, and believe this study to be an important step in the right direction.

Finally, it is a pleasant part of my job in this Preface to offer thanks to a whole host of people and organisations without whom this thesis would never have made it to the page and to your readership. Though the

list is lengthy, I trust the reader will bear with me for this is the only place in which they will receive formal recognition for a whole variety of contributions to my work, and for which I fear I have not thanked them enough personally.

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Firstly, and most importantly, to J. Michael Walton, my doctoral supervisor, whose faith and support were constant and whose intellectual rigour and demand for clarity, coupled with a layman's enthusiasm for the genre and a warm sensitivity were both challenging and reassuring. Without him there would be no thesis!

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To the inspiration of Lloyd Jones and his frocks; of Richard Kennaugh, who works with light as if playing his cello; and of Kenneth Beard, Terry Bowler and Margaret Croft, who taught me to feel, to love and to physicalise music.

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To all my family who provided support and challenge in equal measures and whose love is a rock.

Finally, I would make a dedication to the memory of all those whose work in the musical theatre has been cut short by A.I.D.S., and to Colin Edward Falloon (1958-89) whose love and belief in me were strong enough to keep me moving at the times of the greatest self-doubt, especially after he was no longer there.

To all those, and to those who have been omitted in error, grateful and heartfelt thanks.

Nicholas L. Phillips.

INTRODUCTION

BEGINNERS PLEASE.....

In 1957, a new musical opened on Broadway. Although WEST SIDE STORY received a relatively mixed critical reception, audiences were in no doubt at all that they had stumbled upon a real treasure. Here was a musical that had romance, yet was tough, had an age-old story but was contemporary, had humour and tragedy, had energy and pizzazz, but above all, was an expression of the musical's magic quality which for years has attracted audiences to it.

In addition, with WEST SIDE STORY, audiences sensed a new feeling in it, a new style perhaps, a new language. In performance today one can still feel the same excitement from WEST SIDE STORY. Its language was not a new one for the sake of being of its time, communicating with its contemporary audience. What audiences sensed was a new language of theatrical expression, a dynamic charge in song and dance which was quite distinct from the non-musical theatre. This new language was governed by working principles which had been distilled over many years and many hundreds of musical shows into the purity of essence that lies at

the heart of WEST SIDE STORY. Since its opening the show has had many productions, including a successful film version and retains its power. In addition it has influenced many subsequent musicals both in terms of style and in terms of its working language. For all these reasons, from the instinct of the first night audience to the considered retrospective analysis, WEST SIDE STORY is generally considered to be a 'good' show. And as such it raises many questions.

What makes a 'good' musical? And how do we judge? How do we evaluate or measure? Is it down to whether the show attracts an audience? Should it be purely commercial consideration which affects our judgement? Should it be part of our evaluation at all? If not, then what is left for us to judge? Could it be something to do with the employment of this new language of the musical? What exactly is that language? And how does it work? How had it been used in different ways? How may we compare these different usages in different shows? If it is a new language is it still growing?

Any study of musical theatre reveals that just as the form itself is still relatively young, only having evolved in its modern context in the last hundred years, so criticism and serious study of the form are even younger. Its aim must be to distil the essences of

thought behind the principles of creation in the musical theatre. Only then can a sound methodology for evaluating works be developed. This study aims to learn from both the best examples of the form and also those examples which demonstrate weakness in part or in toto.

As it does so, with reference to shows from the period succeeding the premiere of WEST SIDE STORY, it hopes to try to answer some of the many questions which surround the musical theatre. Indeed, the very question of 'what is the musical theatre?' begins the search for some clue as to why the musical should hold such power over audiences and artists alike.

Most of the serious study so far accorded to the musical has left most of these questions unanswered, the ground untouched: we are all beginners. In that sense this study cannot hope to cover the ground fully, but at least it hopes to cut the turf. As a result we might come across the key which holds the answer to the fascination of the musical theatre.

CHAPTER 1

IN SEARCH OF A GENRE

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Towards a Definition.

The first task of anyone hoping to approach a serious appreciation of musicals as either critic, theatre artist or audience is to go in search of a genre. It is not an easy quest.

Outside primary source material - that is, scripts, scores and recordings, - there are predominantly three kinds of Books on musicals to help guide us. The 'coffee-table' variety, (e.g. Gottfried's Broadway Musicals¹, Jackson's The Book of Musicals)², which are full of pictures and short on incisive commentary. Secondly, there is the historical/anecdotal variety (e.g. Bordman's American Musical Theatre,³ Mordden's Better Foot Forward)⁴ which also include the several biographical texts on authors, composers and performers; and finally, the encyclopaedias full of production details and synopses of shows such as Ewen's Complete Book of the American Musical Theatre⁵ or Stanley Green's Encyclopaedia of the Musical Theatre.⁶

Although all are useful for a thorough background understanding of musicals and help to point us in a general direction, none offer real guidance to the

theatre artist in search of a practical approach. What is more, they demonstrate a great deal of confusion and contradiction over the very nature of musical theatre, with different viewpoints conflicting and seeming to draw the explorer in musical theatre in totally different directions. What can we make of this confusion, and why indeed does it exist at all?

Most historical studies date the birth of the musical from THE BLACK CROOK (1866), an almost indescribable concoction created by the chance combination of a preposterous melodrama and a French ballet troupe which had both been Booked into the New York Academy of Music on the same night. This was dubbed a 'musical comedy' - though no historian documents why. Whatever the reason, it is an unfortunate label that has misled audiences, critics and artists alike for over 100 years, though there is undoubtedly an argument for the term as I shall show later.

It has always held a generalised meaning in the vernacular of the American theatre-going public, but little attempt has been made to substantiate its accurate usage.

The titles of most of the Books published on the subject demonstrate the critical confusion. Smith and Litton's Book of 1981⁷ contains the phrase 'musical comedy' in the title, but they reveal the confusion when in Chapter 24 they call for a new look at the refinement of the 'Book musical'. John Gassner's Encyclopaedia of World Drama⁸ has a large entry under 'musical comedy', including three paragraphs on the difficulty of the term 'comedy'. He suggests 'musical play' as an alternative term, but confesses:

"a problem arises, however, in trying to classify specific works."⁹

This problem still remains with us and is one we must come back to on our journey, but let us for now, address ourselves to the term 'musical play'. In an encyclopaedia of world drama, it is surely not coincidental that the term suggests a dramatist's bias. Gassner seems to take little note of the fact that the excitement and energy unique to musicals, as Gottfried puts it "the emotional kick in the pants,"¹⁰ is something created in plastic terms of production in front of a live audience, not simply the work of the dramatist who writes the 'play'. We must not fall into the trap of looking at musicals as 'drama' on paper, but rather as 'theatre' in performance.

'Musical theatre' then, would seem a better term, and Stanley Green tries to explain the relationship between this term and 'musical comedy':

"Musical comedy is of course a generic term that refers to various forms of entertainment included under the more formal designation of American Musical Theatre. It covers 'operetta', 'comic opera', 'musical play' (now frequently called 'musical')', 'musical comedy' itself, 'revue' and in the past 'spectacle' and 'extravaganza'. These forms are difficult to define precisely, as they usually overlap."¹¹

Such a reading suggests sub-generic categories though Green sidesteps the difficulties of definition. Paul Hustoles in an unpublished thesis¹² attacks the idea of sub-genres with much assurance as a guide to a directorial approach. His work is extremely valuable in this light, as will become clear, though he makes no attempt to define outer limits of the genre. Green traces the growth of musical theatre to the development of the libretto, but then illogically, proceeds to discuss at length, the composers and lyricists. Lehman Engel on the other hand, consistently emphasises the libretto as the heart of the musical, even though he himself trained as a musician.

David Ewen, rather than trying to substantiate his own generic labelling in describing works in The American Musical Theatre, uses terms given to him by the authors which often seem to contradict one another and

then compounds the confusion by inventing other labels that he considers to be aptly descriptive. They include 'musical comedy' (the vast majority), standard labels like 'opera', 'comic opera', 'operetta' and 'musical revue', and the not-so-standard 'musical drama', 'musical play', 'musical farce', 'musical tragedy', 'musical extravaganza', 'romantic musical play', and 'rock musical'.

Gerald Bordman made a valiant attempt to come to grips with a workable generic definition of the current state of musical theatre in the U.S.A., when in 1981 he produced a new label in the title of his American Operetta,¹³ the first time these two words were combined. He begins a historical defence of the term with the European imports of the late 19th century, but by Chapter 11 is in uncomfortable territory with an essay entitled 'OKLAHOMA! - The Musical Play or Folk Operetta'.

The confusion continues in his 1982 American Musical Comedy.¹⁴ In a chapter intriguingly titled 'Musical Comedy in the Heyday of the Musical Play', he also discusses the ubiquitous 'OKLAHOMA!' The musicals singled out for inclusion in one Book or the other seem to be somewhat incongruously separated.

Nevertheless, Bordman is aware of the problem and correctly points out:

"Unfortunately, no clear-cut pattern of nomenclature has emerged. By design or by ignorance, writers and producers have attached whatever description they saw fit to their shows and so have created hopeless confusion from the start."¹⁵

Bordman is only partly right in blaming artists for the confusion. Any historically based attempt to understand the genre has severe limitations. All such studies we have, are testament to the confusion that has arisen from that approach. It may well be that no clear-cut pattern exists because the reasons for the emergence of generic labels have had little to do with fundamental differences in form, and more to do with commercial principles (i.e. what will attract an audience) or a kind of snobbishness (direct or inverse) on the part of music/theatre artists and critics.

Hal Prince, in the third South Bank Show Lecture on London Weekend Television in 1985¹⁶ highlighted just such a problem. Pointing to Rossini as an early exponent of 'popular musical theatre' without actually explaining the reasoning behind this, he points out that it was not until the 19th. century that people began to separate forms and create labels, often for reasons connected with elitism, (what Prince calls "deeply

neurotic reasons"). Not only has this strange snobbishness "greatly endangered a sense of freedom"¹⁷ in theatre artists, but also led to a tendency for all critics, musical and dramatic, to look upon 'musicals' as some kind of lower artistic form.

Julia McKenzie, an actress well-known in the U.K. for her work in musicals reflected this attitude when accepting her 1986 Olivier Award for Best Actress in a comedy (non-musical!) by joking: "Legitimate at last!" Many have sought to have the musical labelled as illegitimate.

In his Short History of Opera,¹⁸ Donald Grout reveals his allegiance as early as page 3:

"Just as every age has its own kind of opera, so every age has its humbler counterparts of the form, designed to appeal to persons of less wealth and less cultivation. These step-children of opera have been known by many different names: opera buffa, opera comique, ballad opera, intermezzo, comic opera, vaudeville, operetta, musical comedy and so on."

Clearly this context is prejudiced from a music historian's bias as opposed to a theatre one. Musical historians, understandably, have a tendency to view opera as 'drama in music',¹⁹ rather than the more theatrically compatible view of 'music within drama'. It also seems to follow from Grout that the 'stepchildren' are comedic in nature, leaving the

serious themes to opera alone. Such a view suggests a naive understanding of comedy at least, and reveals exactly the kind of dangerous attitude Prince tries to identify.

Why are these forms "humbler" in nature, or for people with "less cultivation"? Historians conveniently seem to forget that opera itself is a peculiar hybrid of formalised music and outrageous spectacle. Likewise, musicologists study Mozart operas with only a passing acknowledgement to a librettist, but can a musical theatre critic consider a Rodgers without a Hart, or a Hammerstein? Does significance of the word then make the musical a lesser form? Dramatic critics prove equally culpable. Patricia Madsen notes the problem:

"It is curious.... that so little attention has been accorded to this portion of our theatre. The many American texts on dramatic theory, rarely acknowledge its existence....",²⁰

while Walter J. Meserve in The Revels History of Drama in English (Vol. VIII : American Drama)²¹ reflects the general trend among many critics to dismiss musical theatre as unworthy of serious study. Out of 324 pages, just two are devoted to the musical!. Meserve says:

"Musical comedy must be considered one of the American Theatre's major contributions to world theatre. What it contributes to world drama is another question."²²

Such a view is born of literary criteria equal in narrowness of vision to that of music historians, yet it is doubly ironic in that the musical theatre has been the financial backbone of the professional theatre, certainly in the U.S.A., for many years, as well as being the important contribution that Meserve half-recognises.

Such narrow viewpoints allow us to fall into a dangerous critical trap with regard to musical theatre, that of limited vision and personal bias. Historically, it is true that musical theatre is a hybrid form. A particular allegiance to, or expertise in any one aspect of the hybrid must not be allowed to cloud our vision of the whole. Stanley Green, as already pointed out, follows that dead-end. Personal enthusiasm for the genre is no substitute for well-founded criticism.

Nevertheless, it would seem self-evident to even the most casual theatre-goer that 'musical comedy' is no longer the inclusive term it once was. So what then, are the properties inherent to the form we understand by the vernacular term 'musical', and what should it more properly be called? We already have several clues.

We have a possible label in 'musical theatre', but it means very little by itself. We have Prince's use of the word 'popular', the frequent reference to the musical theatre as 'American' and finally, the necessity for a broad viewpoint which takes account of all the factors that go towards generating that electricity so unique to musical theatre in performance.

Clearly, the label 'musical theatre' suggests a form that is based on a music/theatre alliance of some sort. Since both music and theatre have primitive origins pre-Greek, it is useless to argue parentage or superiority of either. Likewise, the history of the music/theatre alliance can be traced back as far as the Greeks, (which I will consider in another chapter) and any historical perspective based upon the idea of a linear development is clearly nonsense. If we accept that music and theatre have worked in alliance for many hundreds of years, we can view many different forms of that alliance as being separate paths leading off a single major junction, where music and theatre meet.

Leonard Bernstein in The Joy of Music²³ talks of musical theatre as "a species within the genus", but then reverts to a linear analogy by suggesting "a continuum with variety show at one end of the line, and grand opera at the other."²⁴

His criteria for placement on this continuum are based on the number of spoken lines in relation to the amount of music. There is not only an implicit correlation between the amount of music and the 'tone' of the theatre form, reflective of another kind of music snobbishness, it is also an extremely superficial approach from someone who has worked auspiciously in many music/theatre forms. Perhaps it is enough to remind us that an artist's approach is necessarily a subjective one and that an artist tends to understand such matters on a subconscious, possibly even instinctive level, rather than on a consciously objective one. Although Hal Prince, as one of the most influential contemporary musical theatre directors, has many valid and useful things to add to our understanding of the genre, he is quick to point out that much of what he understands was only consciously learned in retrospect.²⁵

Nevertheless, there is some validity in Bernstein's acknowledgement of the importance of the spoken word in musical theatre. Lehman Engel in a keynote address to the 1981 conference on American Musical Theatre upholds that:

"the absence of the spoken word results in a loss of a major part of the musical theatre."²⁶

Indeed, all his analytical studies centre on this very fact, but this in itself is not enough to help us. What we need to do, is to define some precise indication of the fundamental relationship between theatre and music that makes musical theatre a unique and distinguishable 'species' within the music/theatre 'genus'; or in a mathematical analogy, 'what makes musical theatre a subset of the universal set music/theatre alliance?'

With so little positive help on our side, we might beneficially begin by saying what it is not.

Paul Hustoles is particularly useful here.²⁷ Though he dismisses the significant relationship between theatre and music in ancient Greece with little more than a nod, he is correct in pointing out that at the end of the seventeenth century, there was clearly a music/theatre form in which music was essential to the drama. He falls into the usual trap of trying to outline a linear historical development but acknowledges that music was:

"the chief means to further the dramatic essentials of plot, character and/or thought. The lyrics became the play, not simply decoration or embellishment..."²⁸

This is what became known as opera and there are some important things to note about it. It is clearly

distinguishable from theatre without music, but also from theatre with music, because here, music is essential in the furthering of the dramatic idea. Yet Hustoles notes that, in opera, music was (and indeed still is) the "chief means" of conveying the dramatic idea. In the earliest days of its development, this 'opera' became irrevocably musically oriented. The craft of the librettist was subordinated to that of the composer and he became a 'lyric' rather than a 'dramatic' poet.

Reinhard G. Pauley²⁹ spells out the implications of this state, saying that opera is not musical drama, but rather "dramatical music", or "theatricalized music" - or as Grout defines it "drama in music".³⁰

The word opera, and all terms derived from it, including operetta (little opera), suggest this primary emphasis on music. Whether serious or light in tone, the intention is not to focus on the drama conveyed by words and music, but simply on drama conveyed through music. Once again, the importance of words begins to lead us in a particular direction, and it is away from what we understand as opera.

Therefore, for the purposes of this study, opera (and its relations) are not musical theatre.

Also within the universal set of music/theatre we have forms such as those called 'revue' and its close cousins, in the American popular forms of the late 19th and early 20th century, 'vaudeville', 'extravaganza', and 'burlesque'. These forms use music, but not as a means of furthering the drama in any overall dramatic pattern, though they certainly might use it to contribute to dramatic effect in individual songs and sketches. Indeed, as Hustoles correctly points out,³¹ there is rarely any single dramatic purpose to these forms. A reflection of this lies in the fact that often several composers and lyricists were used to provide material for the same show. Rather they were usually disjointed and primarily focussed upon the performers and performance. Frequently, much of the material is structured around the personality of the performer and becomes in that sense non-transferable, whereas characterisation in a dramatic sense is complete and transferable from one actor to another. Revue and its cousins do not have a sustained line of dramatic purpose in terms of characterisation.

So, for the purposes of this study, revue and its relations are not musical theatre.

What we are left with is something that has a fundamental inter-relationship between theatre and

music, where the emphasis is upon theatre, but where music is necessary for the furthering of the drama. There is an importance of the spoken word and some form of sustained characterisation.

The fact that there is sustained characterisation and that music is necessary to the furthering of the 'drama' suggests that there is some kind of central dramatic kernel that seeds the whole creation of a piece of musical theatre and it is what Jerome Kern christened "the Book".

Richard Kislán credits Kern with an important developmental contribution in the identity of musical theatre:

"Kern argued for, experimented with, and demonstrated in action, the 'principle of the Book', from which the mature American musical play would develop." For a long time in European native forms, music dominated the musical theatre.....Kern insisted throughout, that musical theatre must be theatre; an art form meant to be performed on a stage by actors who employ elements of dramatic literature joined to song, to reveal some aspect of human life."³²

This is an important statement in our attempt to understand musical theatre, but Kislán seems almost to suggest that Kern invented the idea. Once again it is Hal Prince in his South Bank Show lecture who takes a more practical view. He suggests rather that Kern rediscovered the idea, due to certain practical

considerations prevalent in America at the turn of this century. European operettas and "English musicals" as he calls them, were being imported and sent to tour all over the U.S.A. This meant their orchestrations had been reduced, their stagings condensed, their personnel severely cut back. The one factor which artists of the time could preserve was 'the Book' - such as it was at that time. 'This', he maintains, 'is the main reason for the beginning of emphasis on the Book'. Kern merely put the idea into new practice and then into words, unlike Wagner, who, of all opera composers, upheld the principle of the Book some five decades before Kern, but who believed in the transcendental potential of music and whose work, magnificent though it may be in musical terms, is bound by its constant emphasis upon music as the primary means of expression. In Kern's principle, music, song, dialogue, dance and design were all capable of becoming the primary means of expression, if, as, and when the ideas of the Book demanded that they be so.

Another German-born composer understood equally well the same principles as Kern. In the programme notes to his 'STREET SCENE' (1947) Kurt Weill states that he tried to create "dramatic musicals" as a form:

"interweaving the spoken word and the sung word, so that the singing takes over whenever the emotion of the spoken word reaches a point where the music can speak with greater effect."

Weill uses the terms sung word and spoken word here in place of our earlier broader alliance of music and theatre/drama. This reflects once again an emphasis on the nature of the performer in musical theatre, and also that, stripped down to its barest essentials, with simply an actor and audience in the same place at the same time, musical theatre is dependent on the combination of word and music.

Thus, our definition stands as follows: Musical theatre is a genre which has a fundamental inter-relationship between music and words, where both are essential for the furtherance of the drama embodied in 'the Book', which is the primary emphasis of the form.

If we accept this definition of musical theatre, why then do people so often refer to the 'American' musical theatre? Is it necessary to impose a geographical limitation upon our definition?

Undoubtedly, there is a traceable strain of musical theatre, carefully documented by almost all the historical studies on musical theatre, which is extant almost solely in America - some would go so far as to say, on Broadway.

Arthur Jackson refers to it:

"Nothing has flowered....to compare with the luxuriant growths of Broadway...."³³

and cites several of the overriding (in his view) characteristics of the Broadway influence, including the cost and size of the undertaking:

"Broadway musicals are a unique kind of theatre,"

says Gottfried, and expands:

"There is a Broadway sound, a Broadway look, a Broadway feel to them..... It is the rhythmic spiel of New York."³⁴

Mordden too, writes of Broadway Babies: The People who Made the American Musical,³⁵ covering both fronts at once.

Hustoles concurs that it is correct to note a geographical spirit within the musical but sees Broadway as too limiting.³⁶ Rather, he suggests the U.S.A. has a rightful claim on the genre. The Revels History, of course refers to the "American contribution to world theatre".³⁷

Historically one can note a definite amalgam of several aspects of differing forms during the late 19th. and early 20th. centuries in America. Operetta, revue, extravaganza, burlesque, vaudeville, minstrelsy and jazz all contributed to the musical theatre centred on the

Book, yet these features have affected musical theatre stylistically rather than fundamentally, hence Gottfried's reference to "a Broadway feel".

There is absolutely no fundamental reason why our attempt to define musical theatre should be restricted by a geographical bias. Indeed, if anything, as we have already seen, the tendency to restrict study of the genre to the American musical theatre of this century is a limiting one.

Certainly the United Kingdom and other European countries have a tradition of musical theatre that is much older than that of the United States. *THE BEGGARS OPERA* (1728), by our definition mistakenly called a 'ballad opera', fits into the category of musical theatre we have outlined, and in more recent years, Andrew Lloyd Webber's work is referred to as musical theatre by Frank Rich, the current theatre critic with the *New York Times*.³⁸ Likewise in Germany, Kurt Weill was aware of writing his dramatic musicals with Bertolt Brecht, long before his self-imposed exile in America, while the latest example from France is *LES MISERABLES* as presented both in Paris and by the Royal Shakespeare Company in London.

The European tradition is a much older one, and one that has changed much less rapidly and forcefully in terms of style than its modern American counterpart.

Nevertheless, it would be foolhardy not to acknowledge the uniquely influential position of the twentieth century American musical theatre in any contemporary study of the genre, and its importance in the reassessment of the genre. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, musical theatre will refer predominantly (but by no means exclusively) to the American musical theatre.

If then, our understanding of musical theatre is not limited by geographical boundaries, there must be a stylistic quality that identifies American musical theatre as such.

Gottfried again is of help:

"Broadway musicals are the outgrowth of a tradition, a taste....This 'Broadway quality is an inheritance from our past's rowdy stages....it is the broad, basic gutsy approach of a theatre meant not for art but for public entertainment"!³⁹

The 'rowdy stages' of America's past are those already outlined, and the jazz music and dancing stemming from the Afro-Caribbean culture is an important element of the stylistic development of American musical theatre in this century. Yet is it true that all

musical theatre is linked to its rowdy stages, to a 'broad, basic, gutsy approach'?

Prince, as we saw, refers to the "popular musical theatre". Again, his breadth of vision is refreshing in his reference to Rossini's work under that label and he would have little complaint over the inclusion of THE BEGGARS OPERA under that banner. Neither John Gay or Rossini are American, or of the twentieth century! But what exactly does Prince mean?

'Popular' in this sense does not refer to commercial success alone, or in other words, being 'a hit', but rather to two aspects of the form. The first is that it has the widest possible appeal (both in terms of content and form); and secondly, on a more specific level, following on from the first point, that its language, verbal musical and theatrical is born of 'folk', that is vernacular idioms.

Gottfried refers to this appeal to as wide a taste as possible as "commercialism" and explains that this:

"has not always proved a deterrent to producing musicals of quality. In fact it is the very basis of their development. The pressure to be an immediate and popular success....requires that the audience be reached and be satisfied."<40

Clive Barnes of the New York Times likewise recognises the commercial angle of musical theatre, but emphasises the vital part the audience has played in the development of the form:

"It is as though drama had been created by its own individual geniuses, whereas the musical has been almost the wish-creation of the ever-changing audience. Of course, certain giant figures....did seem to have an instinctive advance warning of what its audience needed, but it was still fundamentally a talent to provide what people wanted, rather than what the times demanded."⁴¹

Frank Rich goes so far as to place such facility for advance warning of what the public wants at the head of the list of significant factors in the success of Andrew Lloyd Webber.⁴²

Engel agrees that:

"the commercial aspect is very important to an understanding of the situation."⁴³

though a courting of popular success may well be one of the reasons for the snobbishness we have already identified in certain approaches to musical theatre. Nevertheless, this commercial aspect is one related to production rather than the creative process outside it.

Creative artists in the field may agree with Stephen Sondheim, who says that in writing, he does not try to fulfil the audience's expectation of the musical,

but simply to entertain.⁴⁴ Others may be forced into conscious commercial considerations by the economics of production. Either way, the history of musical theatre at its broadest has been, as Prince puts it that of a "commercial art form."⁴⁵

That is, one of a wide popular appeal, whose form has developed in an ever-changing interaction with the demands and responses of its live audience. Thus, on a more specific level, the use of folk or vernacular idioms in language, a subject to which I shall return, but is reflective of that unique interaction.

Not a small consideration in what defines a popular musical theatre may well be expressed by Stephen Sondheim again, when he astutely comments:

"Musicals are what is done in a musicals' house for a musicals' audience....in other words, PORGY AND BESS done on Broadway is a musical, but PORGY AND BESS done at Glyndebourne is an opera."⁴⁶

Clearly this is not a comprehensive statement, but there is more than a grain of truth in such a pragmatic remark about the nature of audience expectation and the part it has to play in our understanding of musical theatre. We are back very firmly in territory where musical theatre must be viewed as complete only in performance.

Because of the importance of the audience's demands on musicals, Alan Jay Lerner, the librettist and lyricist, has noted that:

"the musical has been elected by default to serve in the absence of a poetic theatre, a romantic theatre, a heroic theatre, a moral theatre, and a theatrical theatre."⁴⁷

Whether we believe that a musical theatre serves these functions or not, or, more likely, whether we question that it serves them "by default", this is where we begin to touch on the nature of content, and also the philosophy, outside of which musical theatre cannot operate. Richard Kislán is the only commentator who has begun to explore these areas in a brief introduction to his Book The Musical, and it is clearly an area that needs much more exploration than is available in this chapter, but Lerner's comments are interesting here in comparison to Bernstein's view of the musical theatre.

Note how Lerner, the librettist, views the form as fulfilling many different dramatic functions for a single audience, whereas Bernstein, the composer, works in almost total opposition, seeing musical theatre as only part of a single continuum serving many different audiences.

The many and varied views of both commentators and artists are mirrored, and possibly caused, by the many diverse elements that go to make up a musical theatre production. Both the hybrid nature of its historical development and of its physicality in production might suggest that as a form it would be haphazard and chaotic. Of course, any one of a number of influential shows prove that this is not the case, but it is a more complex form than most people seem willing to appreciate.

Such a complexity is ordered through a process of synthesis. The method of this process was outlined in some respects by Appia at the end of the 19th. century, but the details of the 'hows' of synthesis, we will come to later. For now it is simply necessary to note its existence, as Bernstein did in his Omnibus T.V. show called American Musical Comedy:

"In a way, the growth of our musical comedy can be seen through the growth of integration."⁴⁸

Critic Gerald Weales echoes the thought:

"Although the elements [of musical theatre] are often at war, it is clear that the tendency of musicals....has been towards integration."⁴⁹

This is not to imply that there has been a straight progression from the disjointed to the totally

synthesised musical theatre. Indeed, as we shall see, many recent productions have been trying to reconcile the idea of synthesis with an older disjointed form of musical theatre, yet as a "tendency", Weales comment is sound.

One of the great anomalies of searching for a full definition of the musical theatre is that the more one wants to dissect it, the more synthesised it becomes. This has compounded the difficulties for both critics and artists alike at all levels. In this light, the basic definition needs some rethinking. Firstly, we must take into account that the musical theatre is fundamentally a 'popular' form and that as the hybrid it is, it is also a 'synthetic' form centred on 'the Book'.

Thus a more comprehensive statement might be:

Musical theatre is a form of popular theatre, where music and words are both fundamental to the furthering of the drama embodied in the Book, and where all elements of production are fused in a process of synthesis.

Even reaching a possible definition such as this should not give cause for complacency. Equally important to our understanding is that the musical theatre whole, is always greater than the sum of its parts. When a musical theatre production and an audience come together, something extra happens.

Hal Prince re-emphasises the importance of musical theatre as live performance:

"You've got some kind of conspiracy going....some kind of energy generated..."⁵⁰

But perhaps Gottfried is the most fired by this energy:

"the essence of a musical is the magic made in performance...the transformation of materials into event."⁵¹

Even with all the colours that make up our possible definition, the mixing on the page will be muddy and dull; in the musical theatre performance the colours are painted rather in light combining to produce something dazzling to the senses.

All theatre is ephemeral by its nature. The task is not one of discovery but of rediscovery. There is no simple view of musical theatre, no linear order, in spite of the possible definition we have attained. This study aims to examine some of the aspects of musical theatre, with specific reference to productions of the last thirty years, in the hope of contributing to a fuller understanding of the complex genre and providing a spectrum of colours for both the artist and critic alike.

As we shall see, the generic definition we have tried to create becomes less and less sound all the time. Barriers are being broken on all sides, both within and outside the musical theatre as we have defined it, and the genre we search for today, may not exist tomorrow. However, with the widest possible range of colours to hand, we await the next daring and new combination that will capture the magic of the musical and give us a glimpse of somewhere over the rainbow.

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CHAPTER 2

READING THE MUSICAL

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Building A Model For Analysis.

Musical theatre, as already noted, is a form particularly responsive to and dependent upon its audience. In the 30 years from 1957 (the year of the first performance of WEST SIDE STORY) to 1987 (which saw the Broadway opening of INTO THE WOODS) musicals have displayed a breadth of understanding of this fact. Some shows seem to be geared directly towards pleasing the audience, others less so, but certainly the range of shows demonstrates a keen awareness of this interdependence between production and audience. It is this relationship that creates the special quality people associate with a 'good show'. Moreover, it has an effect upon the creation of a musical and it is this totality of performance we must learn to interpret, not merely one colour of the spectrum.

Such a totality has created great confusion among many of its commentators, as already shown in the difficulty of finding a suitable term to describe the entity to which they refer. The ephemeral quality of any theatrical performance makes it difficult to capture in words, and even if this is achieved for one

performance, it may bear little relation to a performance the following month or even the following night.

Much of the terminology applied to musical theatre in study and criticism, even amongst those who profess to be specialists in the field, is ill-defined and ill-chosen. Moreover, it is only too clear that there is a lack of consistency of approach in methods of analysis. How do we determine what constitutes a 'good' musical? Little attempt has been made to illuminate the darker corners which lie behind this question.

In order to tackle the problem it is necessary to take a step into the principles behind the philosophy of art. Some would argue that the musical does not reward serious critical study except in relation to its performance/audience relationship: that is, in terms of a sociological function. While this is a vital part of understanding the musical, this study will show that the musical is valid as a form in its own right; no longer the hybrid of the chance production *THE BLACK CROOK*, but a unique form with its own language and in need of its own critical vocabulary too. More than that, it has unique properties of expression which in turn affect its cultural function giving it a special place in our contemporary theatrical scene.

The Musical As Theatrical Entity

The term 'musical theatre' gives us a firm starting point. 'Theatre' here is the noun and 'musical' the qualifying adjective. We are fundamentally concerned with the theatrical performance and all the tenets pertaining to it. However, the adjective 'musical' indicates a very specific form of theatre and our analysis must take into account the unique qualities of musical theatre that distinguish it from the non-musical. Nevertheless, comparisons with the non-musical theatre can be extremely useful in our understanding of the form, whereas comparisons with other arts (music, dance, literature, the visual arts) are far less productive, as we shall see.

Susanne Langer, one of this century's foremost philosophers in the realm of art, argues that each distinct art creates a 'primary' illusion by which we may identify it.¹ This illusion is created from raw materials arranged into artistic elements combined to produce a work of art. This is the conscious three-stage process which distinguishes works of art from unconsciously created products of human existence, she argues. By 'primary' she does not mean created first, but rather, always created. So the theatre, in Langer's scheme, always creates the same primary illusion whether

it is musical or not. The musical theatre does not create the same primary illusion as music or dance or the visual arts, though their illusions may function in the musical theatre on a secondary level.

Her work is a complex debate and it would be of little value to rehearse her arguments again here, but this emphasis on musical theatre as 'theatre' first and 'musical' second is vital to our basic understanding of the form.

Thus we must begin by viewing the musical theatre as a total entity in performance; something living, transient, organic. Langer upholds the 'organic' nature of all art:

"like living substance, a work of art is inviolable: break its elements apart, and they are no longer what they were - the whole image is gone."²

In effect, organic creation refers to the unity achieved by the creative process of selection between the artist's spur to create and the finished artefact. In his book Writing The Broadway Musical Aaron Frankel outlines a possible method for the musical theatre artist in assisting this selective process so that the show in performance is "content perfectly expressed".³

The musical in performance is always greater than the sum of its parts. It may be useful to examine the theatrical antecedents of the musical in order to fully appreciate this idea of 'total' theatre.

Theatrical Antecedents To The Musical

The longest standing model we have for a 'total theatre is from Aristotle's Poetics,⁴ which divides the 'totality' of Greek tragedy into six elements:

Thought

Character

Plot

Music

Diction

Spectacle

David Hirst maintains that:

"these Aristotelian criteria have long been discredited in serious theatrical criticism; in the area of musical theatre they are quite useless as tools to understanding the genre."⁵

He tries to argue that the use of Aristotelian criteria is essentially literary-based. In fact, the real reason why Aristotle's model has lasted so long is that it is precisely the opposite - an attempt to deal with the nature of theatrical expression as we perceive it in performance. Indeed it embodies the idea of a

theatrical language above and beyond the power of words alone, and suggests a synthesis of expressive media which Madsen points out has been:

"striven for by every age since the decline of Attic Greece, when drama may have completely realised such an artistic amalgamation for the only time in its history."⁶

Indeed, the classical theatre of Greece and Rome may have more in common with our contemporary musical theatre than might appear on a cursory examination.

Leo Aylen, in his book 'The Greek Theatre', argues forcefully that the great fifth century B.C. poets, Sophocles and Aeschylus, should, in modern terms, be referred to as 'director choreographers'. Sophocles in particular conceived a rhythmic structure to his plays that allowed the sung-dances of the chorus to function as emotional peaks. Aylen states that classical theatre:

"was a totality of experience; every aspect of theatre was held in balance with all the others."⁷

He acknowledges the centrality of the musical parts of the Greek tragedy, and J.M. Walton⁸ notes that a touring company of the time consisted of three actors and, significantly, a musician, since proficiency in the singing and playing of key passages would not have been

possible in the short rehearsal time available in the touring set-up.

In trying to find an appropriate term for this 'totality', Aylen refers to the idea of 'Gesamtkunstwerk', a word developed as commentary to Wagner's musical drama; that is, all the arts working together in totality, each element being used according to its appropriateness for expressing the dramatic idea. This, as far as we can tell, may be an appropriate description of classical tragedy, though the strict conventions we associate with the form of Greek tragedy seem to allow for little variance of expression in the most appropriate manner.

Nevertheless, a clear concept of total theatre emerges from any investigation into the classical theatre of Greece, and theatrical forms throughout the centuries have provided different expressions of this concept of theatrical synthesis. In fact, it is not until the end of the nineteenth century that we began to see a dominance of the word as theatrical expression, associated with the concept of naturalism. The musical may well prove to be a truer expression of the theatrical and dramatic impulse, seen in the widest historical context.

Medieval mystery and morality plays, the court masque, the development of ballet and opera, pantomime, *commedia dell' arte*, melodrama (literally meaning 'sung drama'!) and many other forms stand as examples of a total theatre. As we have noted, the development of opera, (and hence Wagner) must be seen as a move away from the idea of a total theatre towards a new musical form, but the concept of 'Gesamtkunstwerk' is a useful one, nevertheless.

The many forms of total theatre which are historically evident, and their varying degrees of success are clear evidence of how difficult such totality is to achieve. Indeed, there are many artists of the theatre who believe such an all encompassing approach to drama is impossible. Henri Gheon, for one, says of what he calls "super art":

"the more complex the material, the greater its resistance to one who seeks to mould it. As the means multiply, so do the servitudes. The result is that 'total dramatic art' just because of its great resources, becomes in fact, the most confused, the most contingent of all arts, impeded by the heaviest passive resistance, balked at every step by massive obstruction."⁹

Other critics have gone even further; referring to all products of synthesis as mongrel or hybrid arts. Eric Bentley, from that point of view, states:

"...popularised Wagnerism is probably the most widespread dramatic theory - or the most widely held preconception - of our day. The assumption is that theatre is primarily a musico-visual art, an art of spectacle, movement and melody. It is ballet, it is opera. But it is not drama."¹⁰

Yet not all critics are so dismissive. Leonard Pronko, for example, holds up the example of Japan's Kabuki tradition, saying that the drama's:

"harmony of impressions cannot be accomplished by words alone, but must arise from a combination of words and plastic, rhythmical values....and all the performing subtleties."¹¹

Clearly, in Langer's theory, the theatre may use words alone, or any combination of media, in achieving an organic whole: the selection of media is the choice of the artist. His intent in creating is all that matters. Ronald Peacock agrees, and adds:

"the various components of expression are constantly changing their balance in respect of one another; and the contrasts thus available contribute in their own way to dramatic effect."¹²

Such negative and positive attitudes towards the concept of dramatic synthesis provide proof of the problems involved in trying to understand it. Spoken drama, because of its highly literary nature, readily adapts to discursive modes of criticism, itself literary in nature. A theatrical experience, on the other hand, demands a far more complicated method of analysis.

This approach to analysis must clearly be reflective of the many choices an artist has to make in the creation of the musical as a synthesised form. Helpful as a historical perspective on total theatre may be, it provides us with little clue to that process. Even Aristotle divides the evident aspects of Greek tragedy into six categories, seemingly unrelated. How then can we begin to understand the process of synthesis in musical theatre terms?

The Process Of Artistic Selection

The emphasis on the totality of musical theatre as an organic expression is crucial to our intention of building a model for analysis, and, indeed, is the key to its most recent developments as a form. If we fail to appreciate this fusion of elements through the process of synthesis, we lay ourselves open to the trap to which so many have already fallen victim; that of overlooking one aspect of the whole through concentration on another.

Yet it is clearly necessary to identify and appreciate the artistic elements which are synthesised in the whole if one is to understand the process Langer outlines, and achieve a deeper understanding of the values and qualities of the musical theatre.

In another essay, on Poetic Creation, Langer points to this by acknowledging:

" All created factors in a work of art are elements of it. Its elements are what we discover when casually, or carefully, we analyse it."¹³

Until recently, critics of musical theatre have attempted to analyse the form by concentrating on five different 'elements' or categories - the Book, the music, the lyrics, the dance and the design. Martin Gottfried, as recently as 1984, divides the first five chapters of his book Broadway Musicals¹⁴ into these exact categories.

When WEST SIDE STORY opened in 1957, the New York Times sent not one, but three critics to review the show - its drama, dance and music critics. This was due to the fact that the composer, Leonard Bernstein, and director and choreographer, Jerome Robbins, were both eminent artists in their respective fields of 'pure' music and dance. But where do the lyrics fit into this analysis? Should they be reviewed by the drama or music critic? Or by the poetry critic perhaps? There is no obvious answer. Is it little wonder then, that Stephen Sondheim's lyrics for WEST SIDE STORY were barely mentioned by reviewers in 1957? If we analyse the musical in the fashion suggested by the New York Times solution, there are many factors contributing to a

show's impact that may go unnoticed, not least that of synthesis.

The definition of musical theatre proposed in Chapter One quite clearly places the Book at the centre of the modern musical theatre and all other things serve the dramatic concept embodied in it. Why then do Gottfried and others line up the Book as only one of the five elements? Kern expressly states that music and words are put at the service of the Book, but many have contradicted this idea in their attempt at analysis.

Much of the confusion here is due to the choice of terms. The Book, in Kern's terms, is the seed of the entire show. Gottfried seems to agree when he writes:

"the Book of the musical is the basis of the show's existence. It is what the show is about."¹⁵

However he then states:

"Of a musical's three elements - the Book, the music and the lyrics - the Book is the most important,"¹⁶

contradicting both his assertions of the overriding importance of the Book and his subsequent division into five categories.

The problem arises due to his synonymous use of the term 'the Book' to refer to both the seed of the show,

as Kern does, and the spoken dialogue. Other commentators, including Stanley Green,¹⁷ show confusion between the Book and the Libretto.

Lehman Engel, without doubt one of the most perceptive of all commentators of the musical theatre, tackles the problem superbly in his Words With Music - The Broadway Musical Libretto.¹⁸ He accords with Kern in referring to the Book as the seed of the musical, and outlines with admirable lucidity the concerns of translating the Book into Libretto, a dramatic shaping of original ideas. A published Libretto of a show contains stage directions, spoken words and sung words or lyrics, often including descriptions of dances and /or music and light cues.

If the Libretto, then, is an outline of a show using words alone, the Book must be significantly different. In searching for a definition of the musical theatre we referred to the Book as 'the spur to create'. Sondheim, rooted in contemporary musical theatre practice explains:

"Books are what the musical theatre is about....a Book is not only the dialogue; it's the scheme of the show (the way everything is put together) and the style of the show."¹⁹

The scheme of the show - 'the way everything works together' is clearly a concept of synthesis in which the words, music, dance and design are embodied. The Book is not one of the elements as Gottfried would have it; rather it is an embodiment of the idea behind the show. Music, words, dance, design are the Book, at least in conception.

What then are the elements created? Are they the remaining four categories of Gottfried's division - music, lyrics, dance and design. If so, what of the spoken word? Are these not, in fact, the raw materials to which Langer refers, which are subsequently fashioned into artistic elements?

There is clearly more confusion here among critics. Spoken words or dialogue are clearly distinct from music, but lyrics are also words. However they are sung and subject to many of the principles governing musical structure. As the New York Times on WEST SIDE STORY shows, the placing of lyrics is not an easy task.

Our definition clearly makes no distinction between the sung and spoken words. The musical is a form 'where music and words are both fundamental to the furthering of the drama'. At root there is no distinction between lyric and the spoken word, only between words (or literature) and music.

Dance and design are not specifically mentioned in our definition, though it will become increasingly clear that both have a vital role to play in the process of synthesis which governs the creation of a musical show. For that reason, it is important to include them in our list of raw materials at the disposal of the musical theatre artist. Thus our raw materials are:

words as literature

music

dance

design or the plastic arts.

The most immediately striking thing about this list is the that each of the four categories is distinct as an art in its own right, with its own primary illusion, and its own language. How then can these separate art forms be fused into something new? Surely any attempt to make them operate together invites chaos; yet there are any number of shows that stand as testament that chaos is not inevitable.

Again it is Langer who contributes most to our understanding, by describing a process she calls "assimilation".²⁰ Two or more arts can operate at once, she notes, but there will always be one dominant form, a single primary illusion. In the musical theatre, as we have suggested, theatre is the dominant art, the other

arts existing only as a means of theatrical expression. In relation to the musical theatre, the most interesting example of assimilation that Langer gives is that of song. Here, music and literature combine, but music, she argues, to a greater or lesser degree is the dominant art in terms of performance, governing the pace of vocal delivery and creating a vertical subtext of feeling as well as a horizontal temporal movement. The workings of the song will be examined more fully later, but clearly this is only one example of the process of assimilation. Words and music can operate together in other ways; there are numerous examples where music acts only as underscoring to spoken words. It could be argued that here words are the dominant form. Nevertheless, it is evident that art forms can and do operate together; in the musical theatre they work in the service of the theatrical whole.

Madsen points out that:

"every evaluation of form must begin with an examination of substance. To learn what a thing is made of is to learn what that thing can be - and what it cannot be."²¹

Or as Jerome Stolnitz puts it:

"the physical medium is not simply passive like the wax which takes the imprint of a seal. It has a character of its own, which permits some things to be done with it, but not others."²²

Broadly speaking, the musical theatre is carved out of time and space. Each of its four component media, however, is moulded in a particular way. Music, for example, is created by sound vibrating through space and ordered through time. Dance, on the other hand, cannot exist without the human body, delineating and confronting time and space through an ordered expression of the movement of the body in reaction to its environment. Literature and design equally have their own ordering and relationship to time and space. Understandably, as the manipulation of their common media differ among these four arts, so they will affect the musical theatre whole in different ways. As Madsen says:

"Mindful always that this whole is irrefutably the art of theatre, we see that the complexities of synthesis exist at a foundation level."²³

With four differing media at the disposal of the musical theatre artist, the process of selection is a greatly enlarged one in relation to the non-musical theatre. In addition to the properties of words and design, the musical theatre artist must comprehend what factors exist in the nature of music and dance which permit:

"some theatrical things to be done with them, but not others." ²⁴

In examining shows from the last thirty years we shall see how clearly this has been understood by recent creative artists in the musical theatre, and how some artists have begun to explore and discover new and exciting combinations of these media in the service of the musical. For the moment however, let us return to our total entity of theatrical performance.

Langer outlines sound reasoning for her assertion that the theatre is 'poetic' form, essentially presentational in its symbolism and in its ability to communicate:

"I do believe that in this physical space-time world of our experience there are things which do not fit the grammatical scheme of expression. But they are not necessarily blind, inconceivable, mystical affairs; they are simply matters which require to be conceived through some symbolistic scheme other than discursive language."²⁵

This is particularly relevant to the musical theatre, which Graves upholds as creating a language:

"for the realm of subjective experience, emotion and wish".²⁶

Here we begin to come closer to the essence of musical theatre, the crucial question being 'Why a musical theatre at all'?

Obviously, this moves away from the idea of form and back towards the sociological function of the musical theatre, but it is an essential part of our understanding of the total entity of performance.

In the non-musical theatre, the elements created are not words and design; rather the elements are the dramatic concepts of character, plot, theme, situation, and most importantly, the act. All drama is centred upon the performer, equipped with speech and body, and, using oral and visual communication, we are presented with characters, confrontations, attitudes, tensions. This constitutes the Act as the basic element of abstraction; or as Graves describes it:

"Any sort of human response - physical or mental."²⁷

Frankel suggests that the essence of the Book should be capable of being summed up in a single sentence in which the verb should be active.²⁸ Langer proposes that the primary illusion of all Drama is that of:

"a virtual future...a sense of destiny."²⁹

This sense of the future is created by the transient nature of performance. Utilising literature ('a virtual past') and the nature of performance ('a

virtual present') we are given a sense of what may happen afterwards, in relation to both the inner life of the performance and our own lives. Such a proposal would certainly be in line with a sense of the theatre's ability to influence us.

It is Artaud who upholds that fundamental to the dramatic impulse is the understanding that:

"the theatre is the last general means we have of directly affecting the organism."³⁰

There are many who would repudiate the notion that drama possesses the capacity to move its audience members to action, but few would deny that its most meaningful moments occur when as Wagner expressed it, we:

"become knowers through the feeling... ".³¹

What must be remembered is that basic to the "means" Artaud refers to, and essential to the affection of feeling - quintessential, in short, to the dramatic art itself - is its basic medium: the performer. Madsen writes:

"If the theatre is pure art, it is so only because of the singularity of his spontaneous performance. If the experience is profound, it is so only for the magnitude of his expressive nature."³²

Clearly adding music and dance to the range of expression of the performer enlarges his ability for directly affecting the audience; indeed, as we shall see, enhances it considerably, due to the inherent properties they possess as natural human expression in the form of song and dance.

It is the performer in the musical theatre who helps us to answer the question 'why a musical theatre?', for it is not merely by chance that the musical theatre performer is often referred to as a 'song and dance man'. It is the utilisation of song and dance that distinguishes him from the performer in the non-musical theatre. Of course, song and dance may be utilised in the non-musical theatre, but in the musical song and dance are the primary means of expressing the Act. In a scene in the musical theatre, a song is not an adjunct but becomes the scene itself; the acting of that song, governed by the considerations of time imposed by the music, in effect becomes dance. In line with our definition, words and music are 'essential to the furthering of the drama'.

Why, then, a musical theatre? Quite simply because song and dance are heightened planes of human expression with unique powers of communication, raising the listener to a higher plane of experience than does

ordinary speech. Music has the power to work subliminally on the deepest emotional level, triggering all sorts of personal recollections in terms of experience and feeling in the listener, and song invests its ideas with a radiant emotional power that gives the feeling the wings to soar above reality. When we grow attached to a song it is deeply felt because it somehow springs from life's experience and yet at the same time manages to transcend them. As Kislán says:

"Song raises the ordinary to the exceptional, making it more real than real."³³

This power of song as a means of expression is of crucial importance to the musical theatre artist. Equally important is the understanding that song is a natural expression. Singing, and indeed dancing, are instinctive modes of human expression, usually at moments of extreme emotion. We should hardly wonder at the fact that song and dance are vital components of the rituals of all cultures. Equally, they are an inherent part of much 'play' in cultural life, and evident in most theatrical forms throughout history.

Such powers of expression are clearly embodied in the modern musical theatre, and indeed are at the basis of creating a musical. In effect, an understanding of this potential of song and dance governs the selection

of idea behind the Book. Accepting the Book as the spur of organic creation in the musical theatre, clearly the idea behind the Book must have an inherent musicality if it is to be workable as a musical show - that is, it must 'sing'.

Kislan, agreeing with Graves concerning the presentational nature of the musical, suggests that the value of a musical theatre Book rests not so much on considerations of story, plot shape or balance:

"but on the Book's potential as catalyst for the total presentational opportunities in the show's idea".³⁴

Quite clearly, this means that if presenting a theatrical idea through song and dance is not significantly different and more effective than presenting an idea without it, there is no point in creating a musical at all. Madsen concurs:

"If the drama itself does not possess an inherent musicality, to musicalise it would be meaningless."³⁵

It should be noted here that dance was not one of the required media of the musical theatre in our definition, but, as pointed out, all ordered movement to music can be considered as dance, and thus is implicit in the phrase 'musical theatre'.

Clearly, there is more to be said concerning the characteristics of music and dance which make them capable of creating, or contributing to, the dramatic experience, but the complexities of artistic selection in the musical theatre are of prime concern here, and we need simply to note the influence they exert on the creation of a unique language in the musical theatre.

Thus, the four media we have identified in the creation of the musical can be seen not to be the artistic elements of Langer's three stage creative process, but rather as different modes of expression which operate throughout the process.

Firstly they influence the choice of idea embodied in the Book. Secondly, they are utilised in the creation of the artistic elements of drama; that is, character, plot, theme. Thirdly, they operate as part of the production process centred on the performer, the song and dance man. Finally they operate directly in affecting the audience.

Thus, as a variation of all theatre, the musical theatre merely adds music and dance to the range of expressions available to the artist in creating a theatrical performance. Yet, in including these, it is possible to create new expressions, new means of communication, a new language.

Writing of WEST SIDE STORY in Dance Magazine, David Boroff applauded the show for:

"the creation of a new language of feeling"³⁶

It is this creation of a new language that is the basis of any argument for the musical theatre to be considered as a unique form.

The creation of this language is nevertheless centred, as in all drama, on the performer. In effect the problem of selection in the artistic process should be no more difficult than for the non-musical theatre. Music and dance are then viewed merely as extensions of the performer's voice, his movement and his reasoning faculties, and an effect or combination of expressive modes is employed only because it is the best effect the performer can utilise for the presentation of a specific dramatic moment.

Stark Young reflects this principle of artistic expression in what he calls 'the several voices of the theatre':

"The importance or expressiveness of each of these languages will vary according to what is to be expressed, since one quality or idea is best expressed in words, another in gesture or colour, another in sound."³⁷

As we shall see, this principle has often been abused by the musical theatre - prettiness interpolated where meaningfulness belonged; spectacle where sense was needed; lyricism when the moment called for direct impact. Equally, there are fine examples of the suitability and effectiveness achieved as a result of the principle of artistic selection. When offences against the drama's rationality do occur, they in no way deny the validity of the process; they only destroy the artistic validity of the works in which they occur, and, in so doing, render ordinary the audience's experience.

Thus, it is the aptness of selection in the utilisation of different media, alone or in combination, that provides the initial measurement of evaluation; its observation or violation an immediate indication of the musical's success or failure in creating an organic whole.

In the next chapter we shall examine the qualities of the media employed by the musical and the nature of synthesis, which allows the media to operate at the same time and create new forms and conventions of dramatic expression.

However, the selection of media and their synthesis is only part of the creation of the musical theatre. The other aspect deals with the variables in which these

media operate, and it is these variables we shall try to pin down in the remainder of this chapter.

The Musical Theatre Artist

In Langer's description of the three stage creative process, it is easy to comprehend a single artist operating with a single medium. However, in the musical theatre we have not only several media being utilised, but also the conception of a collaborative team as 'the artist'.

We might immediately think of well-known composer/lyricist collaborations such as Rodgers and Hammerstein or Ira and George Gershwin, but musical shows equally employ writers of dialogue, directors, choreographers, designers and orchestrators in addition to performers and technicians who work on the production. Any one of these people may have the initial idea for a show, but all have an effect upon the creation of the musical in performance.

There are two main reasons for this. The first is the wide breadth of craft that would be required by a single individual in mastering the techniques of each of the media employed by the musical, hence the necessity of collaboration in many cases in order to bring to the

show the expertise required. But secondly, and more importantly, is the emphasis on presentational values in the musical theatre. Written records of productions show many a musical being created 'on its feet' in the rehearsal process, since it is only then that the presentational opportunities afforded by the Book can be created and tried out. If a moment seems to demand expression through dance, for example, how can one possibly create that moment until the dance is living on stage or in the rehearsal room?

Every member of the collaborative team has an important and crucial role to play in the creation of a musical. In PHANTOM OF THE OPERA, for example lyricists Hart and Stilgoe, director Prince and designer Bjornson contribute significantly to the show's effect, even though the initial conception was that of the composer Lloyd Webber. Likewise, WEST SIDE STORY was the idea of director/choreographer Jerome Robbins, but was equally notable for the work of Bernstein, Sondheim and Laurents on music, lyrics and dialogue.

As with the synthesis of media, so individual collaborators must synthesise into a single artist in the creation of a musical. As Sondheim puts it:

"It's really a question of intent....you have to make sure, at every step of the way, that you're all writing the same show."³⁸

It is only too clear that different intentions among collaborators can lead to the ruin of a good idea for a musical. It is that intent that is crucial to the blueprint of the Book; as Sondheim says, "the scheme, the style of the show."

If the intent is embedded in the Book; then there is every chance that the show will grow into an organic and natural whole and the process of artistic selection in employment of the media will be a natural one.

Thus, in order to fully appreciate the aptness of artistic selection in the musical we must take account of the artist's intention in creating the show; that is, the ideas the artist wants to express.

Although the range of ideas capable of expression in the musical theatre is one governed by the inherent properties of the media employed, it is nevertheless an enormous one, and must be the first of the variables considered when viewing a musical show. These ideas, as we have seen, are embedded in the Book, as the schematic and stylistic blueprint of the show.

Dramatic Structure In The Musical

Clearly, the Book must subsequently be fashioned into the artistic elements of all drama: expression of

theme through character, plot, situation, the Act, as defined by Graves.

The choices the artist makes in using the media to express the ideas in the Book are again subject to a vast range of possibilities. On the one hand, the emphasis may be on character revealed through song; another artist, however, may feel the best expression of theme may be through a more abstract use of dance or design. The combinations seem endless and it is the task of each artist to discover and employ devices of artistic expression that best suit his purpose.

The form such a structuring takes must be as complete an outline of the entire show as possible, including all the presentational modes of expression, something not easy to capture in words. As opposed to a play, which is presented as a script, the dramatic structure of a musical takes the recorded form of a Libretto, a Musical Score (including orchestration), a Dance Score, presenting the essential choreographic shapes and steps necessary to the dramatic expression, and, possibly, Designs for set, costume, lighting, again where they are essential to dramatic expression. Such a rendering of the dramatic structuring of the musical, a kind of 'musical theatre script', presents all kinds of problems to the recording of that 'script'. As pointed

out, many shows are created during the initial production process, and it is all too easy for an essential element of the show to go unrecorded in the frenzy of activity which generally takes place prior to the opening of a new show. Dance steps, costumes, orchestrations, spoken lines are frequently changed up to and during previews, and are as likely to change after the show's opening. CHESS, for example, had several different stagings of 'One Night In Bangkok' during its run in the West End, and was virtually rewritten for its Broadway opening, eliminating 'The Arbiter's Song', one of the undoubted highlights of the London production.

Equally, it presents problems for anyone wishing to stage a show after the original production; how much of the original presentation is essential to the dramatic expression? In most cases, the Libretto and Musical Score are all that is required for a production to be mounted, but the American Dance Machine has been recreating and recording many of the most notable dance sequences in the American musical theatre, and maintaining that they are essential to the presentation of the show. (Also, they argue, the choreographers of these numbers should be accorded equal rights with composer and lyricist in the division of royalties!) Who can say that a show conceived in dance terms, such

as A CHORUS LINE, is not rooted in its choreography, and thus only capable of production with the original steps?

The blurring of the distinction between the creative process of dramatic shaping of the Book and the production process, means that many 'new' productions of musical shows are merely pale imitations of original productions. In effect, a production of a musical is always an act of creation; of discovering presentational devices based upon the concept of synthesis inherent in the Book, and subsequent script.

However, it is imperative for the scholar of the musical to try and distinguish the elements of dramatic structuring from stylistic technical effect in performance, if s/he is to assess the aptness of artistic selection in the creation of the show, even when that selection is based on the presentational qualities of the media employed.

Thus, the second variable must be the discovered devices of artistic creation with relation to dramatic structuring.

The Interpretive Process

Since the musical is frequently created in performance, the performers and technicians connected

with the production might well be considered creators - that is, included in our concept of the musical theatre artist. Yet their fundamental role in presenting the show at each performance is as interpreters of the dramatic structuring identified as the second variable factor in the musical. Interpretation (or the production process, as distinct from the creative one) is the third variable.

In the theatre, many factors in the production process affect the nature of performance. Casting is the primary consideration that affects the audience directly in performance: which performers, singers, dancers, musicians and crew are available to the production. All members of a company will bring with them different talents and abilities in their own field. In the musical, this is even more important, where the emphasis on creation during production means that material is fashioned according to vocal range, for example, or dance training.

Equally important, however, is the arena of production - how the show is financed, which audience it is aimed at, how much money is available for employing 'stars' or for staging considerations, and which theatre is used for the performance.

If, for example, a star name is hired, the material may be restructured to highlight the qualities the public associates with that star. In SWEENEY TODD, a large part of the material for Mrs. Lovett was written after Angela Lansbury was engaged to play the role.

Such considerations would rightly be considered commercial, but in the musical, Prince's "commercial art", they have an equal place alongside dramatic ones. There is plenty of evidence to show that some shows have been created based on these considerations, rather than more traditional artistic ones. Indeed, in America, shows have been created primarily as a marketing vehicle for particular companies and their products, but this does not necessarily make them any less valid in terms of our definition of musical theatre.

In considering the implications of this, it is important to note that the cultural climate at the time of presentation may well affect the creation of the show, as well as the response to it.

Most importantly, to ignore the opportunities afforded by both the physical arena of production and the cultural climate is to ignore a crucial variable factor in the creation of musical theatre.

Affecting The Audience

As already noted, many would consider that the most important consideration in assessing the musical is not anything to do with expression of ideas, devices of dramatic expression or the nature of the production arena; rather it is rooted in giving the audience that special experience which all critics identify as being associated with the musical theatre. The main emphasis must be on creating that special bond between the performance and the audience which is at the heart of the dramatic art. Thus, the fourth, and, arguably, the most important variable must be that of public response.

This, again, may have an effect upon the creation of the show, for the special experience may be the prime concern for the artist; that is, to please the audience. By manipulation of the media chosen, the artist may create a show that fulfils both a theatrical and a sociological function. There is undoubtedly a current trend for this sort of approach to the musical, especially in the U.K., where STARLIGHT EXPRESS, as we shall see, serves exactly this purpose and still plays to full houses after four years, even though critics on both sides of the Atlantic were vociferous in attacking the show's limitations on dramatic grounds alone.

It would be wise to note here, however, that the variable factor of public response is not the same as that of commercial success in financial terms. This is something to be examined later in the study, and, in effect, commercial success has more of a relationship with our third variable than with the fourth of public response.

What is clear is that all four variables will have an effect upon the creation of a musical to a greater or lesser degree, and since any one of them may be of prime concern in the initial spur to create, it would be folly to ignore any of them in consideration of the show in performance.

The Musical Theatre Spectrum

In the same way that the four media used by the musical theatre are capable of being synthesised at root level into a new language, so the four variables identified must be synthesised into a new totality if we are to consider the relative merits of the work as a theatrical entity.

Langer outlines these four variables as factors which affect all works of art, in the creation of an organic whole:

- "i) the ideas the artist wants to express
- ii) the discovered devices of artistic creation
- iii) the opportunities offered by the physical and cultural environment
- iv) public response".³⁹

In the musical theatre, the four media operate within all four bands of this spectrum, affecting each in different ways, and any one of those media in relation to any one of the variables may be the point of conception of a musical show.

Such a breadth of considerations and such a complexity of synthesis throughout the form make rigorous demands on all who attempt analysis of the musical theatre. In addition, the musical exists as a living denial of the Romantic idea of a single artist working solely to express an inner response to the world around him. Little wonder that critics resist the form. What is surprising perhaps, is that they tend to dismiss the musical as simplistic and naive, where clearly the form is of the utmost complexity. If it has seemed simplistic, it is due to poverty of idea, conservatism of theme, or paucity of expressive convention. The last thirty years have seen many shows which tackle all these aspects of 'naivety', and which have expanded the boundaries of the musical theatre beyond those recognised in 1957. What critics have failed to realise

is that all these shows still operate within the same variables we have identified:

- i) the Book
- ii) the presentational devices of dramatic structure
- iii) the arena of presentation
- iv) public response

Langer points out that specific points on these variables are frequently given as constants by critics and this distorts the critical view. In the musical, as we have seen, set attitudes concerning means of expression in any one of the variables has frequently created differing opinions about the same show. Those critics who see Broadway as the true home of the musical, for example, may not consider an off-Broadway small-scale production, such as MARCH OF THE FALSETTOS, as a 'real' musical, whereas the aptness of artistic selection may be superb.

A recent example of such fixed critical viewpoints came in 1987 when the Observer, reviewing PACIFIC OVERTURES in the English National Opera production, printed the remarks of its music and drama critics side by side.⁴⁰

Michael Ratcliffe, drama critic, refers to the show as:

"a brilliant theatre piece."

Nicholas Kenyon, the music critic, writes, on the other hand:

"if you blew hard on this show, it would flutter away."

Clearly, Ratcliffe is viewing the piece as a theatrical entity, and assessing it in relation to the presentational qualities working on an audience. One suspects that Kenyon is referring more specifically to the musical score, and drawing unwarranted comparison with the operatic scores that are usually associated with the company. As we shall see, the principles governing the composition of a musical theatre score are very different from that of an opera score where music is the primary mode of expression throughout.

It is not uncommon either for fellow drama critics to have fundamentally different opinions of the same show, based not on variations in interpretation or concessions of aesthetic taste, but on a fixed personal attitude they bring to the musical theatre in place of a sound analytical process. This study intends to examine works in relation to the four variables identified, and

assess their relative merits according to the aptness of artistic selection in the employment and synthesis of its media, placing all works within the musical theatre spectrum.

Assesing a show according to its 'organic' quality means that each show demands appreciation on its own terms, not from any fixed point on the variable. As a result of this approach, comparisons with other musical shows are valuable in our understanding of the range of the variables, but are no basis for value judgements in themselves. What is most vital here is to try to eliminate judgements based upon personal taste, which are all too frequent among devotees of the musical.

Retaining our idea of a musical theatre 'spectrum', it is useful to visualise a show being plotted as points in each variable band. The process of synthesis is then seen as the joining together of those points, creating a new 'graph-like' entity. Every show will have its own individual graph, and when artistic selection is apt to the expression of the Book, we will be able to successfully join the plotted points into a line through the entire spectrum. Such a visualisation is admittedly rather clumsy, but helps us to retain the idea of the musical as theatrical entity.

Artistic Polarities

The idea of identifying a show by plotting its position within the four variable bands is, of course, redundant unless we identify the polarities at either end of the spectrum. In order to do this, it is helpful to take a look at the Semiotic status of musical theatre in particular.

Particulaarly valuable is the contribution of Iso Osolsobe, Professor of Semiotics at Prague University, and he elucidates, in a lecture titled 'Vienna's Popular Musical Stage As A Semiotic Institution', the semiotic status of the theatre in general, and of the musical theatre in particular.

Semiotics, the science of signs, is interested in communication. A semiosis is 'a communication situation'. Theatre is, he argues, a kind of "semiotics to the third power".⁴²

Firstly, it is semiosis; a production communicating to an audience; secondly, it is interested in observing semiosis; and thirdly, and uniquely, it does so by generating an artificial semiosis through its characters.

Of course, there are dangers in a semiotic view of the theatre, since it views theatre merely as a

communication situation that is directionally one way, not an art with multi- levels of interaction, as we have seen it to be. Osolsobe, however, is clearly aware of the danger. In fact, he goes on to argue that due to its third created level of semiotics, theatre is the instinctive expression of humanity's interest in its own ability to communicate. As such, semiotic analysis of the theatre is redundant he points out:

"Theatre need not be taught semiotics; instead of pupil, it can be teacher."⁴³

This may explain why commentators of the theatre have never been able to put into words what has been instinctively felt and understood by great theatre artists over the centuries, and also, why many of those artists have been reluctant to try and express that theatrical instinct in words alone. It certainly reflects Langer's idea of 'presentational symbolism', non-discursive in mode, and Graves' 'realm of subjective experience'.

At the first U.K conference on musical theatre, Osolsobe describes the musical theatre as:

"a unique semiotics of communication",⁴⁴

differing from the already complex semiotic status of theatre in general due to the process of synthesis; the

fusion of different expressive media into a single force: Boroff's new language of communication.

In addition, he suggests that all forms of communication operate on two aesthetic levels; that is, are capable of being received and understood in two different ways. He labels them:

- i) "the aesthetic of discovery"
- and ii) "the aesthetic of opulence".⁴⁵

In effect, this means that we are able to interpret through the intelligible means of conscious thought, logic, that part of the brain which has the ability for conceptual thought; at the same time, we receive direct, 'non-discursive' messages which directly affect the organism through sensory perception, the non-cerebral mode.

For example, speech has a learned meaning with established conventions of structure, which allows us to standardise a communication system through words. However, words also have both an oral and aural sensory quality - (oral in speaking, and aural in hearing words) - which colour language for both speaker and listener. Indeed, some words, onomatopoeia, communicate primarily through their sound; likewise, poetic forms use the sound of words to create rise and fall in sound

patterns which suggest meanings beyond the logical ones. In the non-musical theatre, any Shakespearian actor quickly becomes aware of how vital the 'aesthetic of opulence' can be in performing and interpreting the richness of the poetry.

As I have already suggested, the presentational mode of the musical theatre takes on more significance than it does in the non-musical theatre; in fact, makes the presentational mode of communication a priority in terms of dramatic expression, and when we examine the dramatic potential of music and dance, the reasons for this will become abundantly clear. In fact, as Engel suggests,⁴⁶ the musical theatre may have more in common with the poetic theatre of Shakespeare and his contemporaries than with the non-musical theatre of the twentieth century.

For the moment it is useful to understand this principle of a dual aesthetic with relation to the musical. All four of the media identified operate on both levels, and the same should be true when these media are synthesised in the musical.

Victor Perkins, at the same U.K. conference as Osolsobe, denotes two levels of perception in the audience of film musicals, though he labels them more simply as:

- i) "credibility"
- and ii) "pleasure".⁴⁷

He refers to the film of *A STAR IS BORN*, starring Judy Garland, and explains how the director uses the camera to effectively move from a credible situation in terms of the plot, to a moment of sheer pleasure when the focus turns to Garland's stunning voice in her performance of 'The Man That Got Away'. What is also clear here is that this moment of pleasure, of pure display, is used in the dramatic service of the film, for it sets up the rise to success of the character 'Esther Blodgett'. At the same time, as a major comeback movie for Garland, it allows the audience to appreciate her talents at an early point in the film. As the song ends, and we hear applause, the camera draws back to reveal Norman Maen (played by James Mason) observing her performance, and we are pulled back into the credible reality of the story.

This is a fine example of how a moment of display in terms of the musical, admittedly here on film, can be used to serve dramatic function, and where for a moment the dramatic and performance power of the song allows us for a moment to forget that what is happening is really incredible in terms of the story: a humble singer, jamming with a few friends after hours in a night-club

becomes Judy Garland's voice, stunningly recorded, and dazzlingly backed by a perfectly tuned jazz-arrangement!

In theatrical terms such a balancing act between credibility and pleasure takes place at every moment, and the shift between the two aesthetic polarities is one of the most skilful aspects of musical theatre craft, and one all too frequently overlooked. How many times have we been involved in a musical story, and suddenly found ourselves presented with a 'cue for a song'? Or been launched into a frenzied dance routine which then seemed to hold up the show for ten minutes to no effect?

These transitions between polarities are reflected by shifts of emphasis in the combination of media synthesised for a particular moment of dramatic expression. Once again, there are numerous examples of shows where these transitions are clumsy and do a disservice to the dramatic potential in the Book. Equally, shows have failed to appreciate the level of aesthetic reception for their audience, even as they have created their language. Emphasis may have been placed on a moment of plot when the show required a theatrical lift, or may have rested with scenic display when character should have been the focus.

Clearly, this understanding of aesthetics adds yet another factor for the musical theatre artist to juggle in the creation of a show. No element of the musical operates on a single aesthetic level, but the aesthetic emphasis in the employment of media at all stages of the creative process must be justified in relation to the total entity for us to value the musical as a good' show. So in addition to our aptness of selection of media, we may now relate this to the balance of aesthetic considerations in our value judgements.

These aesthetic levels are not merely factors relating to selection of media, however; we have seen also how they affect the nature of reception. Most important here is that an audience is capable of receiving messages on both levels at once. In the musical, this is compounded by the fact that they are able to receive different kinds of signals from different media on both levels at once! The human organism is a deeply sophisticated mechanism in that respect. With so many signals being emitted and received in the musical, it makes the question of transition from one emphasis to another extremely important, and we shall see that this consideration is at the very heart of the synthesis we identified as crucial to the musical theatre in our definition.

As Osolsobe maintains,⁴⁸ neither aesthetic works alone, and neither is more important than the other. Perkins ⁴⁹ goes so far as to suggest that the form is most successful when the two are working together at the same time and in equal force. In fact, it is impossible for the musical to exist at one pole or the other, but, as concepts, they sit like pots of gold at either end of the musical theatre rainbow.

a	o		a	d
e	p	1) Ideas - the Voice of the Musical	e	i
s	u		s	s
t	o		t	o
h	f	2) Devices - the Form of the Musical	h	f
e	n		e	v
t	c		t	e
i	e	3) Arena - the Workings of the Musical	i	r
c			c	y
		4) Response - the Function of the Musical		

The variable bands here are those of Langer as applied to the musical theatre, the four headings being those used in the second part of this study to examine shows of the last thirty years, and to assess both their skill in the process of artistic selection and their understanding of aesthetic emphasis.

Searching For Evidence

In order to help our analysis, there are several sources to which we might turn relating to each of the variables.

To begin we must refer to libretti, scores, dance notations, and designs - the recorded embodiments of the media fashioned in the service of the show. In addition, we have recordings, video and audio, of shows. Likewise, director's notebooks or promptbooks contain a wealth of information that may help us to understand the creative and interpretative process, and the choices made with regard to individual shows.

Obviously, reviews give an impression of critical and public response to a show, and factors affecting the commercial aspect of a show's life can be distilled from box-office records and financial accounts of a production, as well as examination of publicity material and advertising strategy.

There are a number of useful biographies and autobiographies of musical theatre artists (composers, directors, lyricists and performers, primarily) as well as interviews with the media which often reveal a good deal regarding intent in a show, though many artists are reluctant to talk about that aspect of their work, preferring the show to speak for itself.

At the beginning of this study, I referred to some of the published historical and theoretical studies of the musical theatre, and, in addition, there are the

unpublished academic papers and theses which may prove beneficial, especially with relation to theory and methodology in the musical.

Notably, little has been done in the area of market research in the musical with regard to audience expectation and/or audience satisfaction. This is due primarily to the tendency for producers to assume that full houses mean audience satisfaction, but in these times of media hype and marketing priorities, the reasons for full houses are no longer directly related to audience satisfaction, if indeed they ever were.

In fact, documentation of material relating specifically to musical theatre is haphazard. Publishers perceive a tiny market and the cost of most books, libretti and especially musical scores, when available, is consequently high. Some areas are good, notably audio recordings and ephemera, such as publicity material and programmes, but others, such as promptbooks, original working material, orchestrations, designs, photographs and so on, are still exceptionally difficult to locate. With the exception of New York's Performing Arts Library at Lincoln Centre and one or two American University libraries, there has been little attempt to rectify this state of affairs.

A final source of additional information may be gleaned from direct interview with artists currently practising in the musical theatre, and I am particularly grateful to those who gave of their time to help with this study.

Of course, the best source of information for anyone interested in analysis of the musical theatre is to experience the show in performance as either a member of the audience or, indeed, of the production. In a total form such as the musical theatre, where the emphasis on presentational values is so strong, it could be argued that it is the only true primary source of information. All the shows referred to in this study are those seen in performance by the author (though not necessarily the original production!) at one time or another, or are shows on which the author has taken an active role in production.

Only through direct experience does one begin to come close to understanding the complexity of the form, and to appreciate the dazzling range of colours, singly and in combination, which make up the musical theatre spectrum. An understanding of all of those colours is necessary to anyone hoping to make a complete analysis of the form. The nature of synthesis in the form, however, is the factor that puts the musical out of

reach of many who work in any one of the media used by the musical, or in the non-musical theatre, and reduces the likelihood of valuable achievement. Above all, the musical must never be regarded as a simple form. Yet its complexity of structure, and the vast potential that complexity suggests, is the very factor that has continued to attract artists and audiences alike.

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CHAPTER 3

THE MEDIA OF THE MUSICAL

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The Foundations Of Dramatic Synthesis

As was noted in Chapter Two "every evaluation of form must begin with an examination of substance",¹ as Madsen puts it. Stolnitz is possibly the most insistent on this point, arguing that the basic materials of any art possess properties which influence their possible use and the development of form.² In the musical theatre we can identify four different and separate arts in operation - literature, music, dance and visual art - in the service of the dramatic seed. Acknowledging that the complexities of synthesis occur at foundation level, we must examine the individual modes of operation of each of these arts - that is, how they manipulate their common materials in different ways - if we are to make any real attempt at assessing how they are utilised in the service of the musical theatre.

First in our consideration must be the proposal of Langer that each art creates its own primary illusion.³ Ultimately, of course, we are concerned only with how these four arts are harnessed in the service of the theatre, but the distinctions they possess as unique art forms in their own right highlight the problems of

synthesis. If each art creates its own primary illusion or, to use Langer's favoured term, "virtual reality",⁴ then the process of synthesis must reconcile the differences in each arts ordering of aural and visual signals in time and space if it is to create a new form. The entire history of musical theatre forms is a record of the many attempts at this reconciliation. When this has been achieved, (and it is arguable whether or not it ever has), then a new language is created - the language of the musical theatre.

This new language may well be non-discursive, but nevertheless it has meaning, and the question of meaning in art is at the heart of our analysis. If, as one philosopher tells us:

"the problem of convention is the problem of how art can be communicable,"⁵

in order to comprehend the ways and means of musical theatre it will be necessary to isolate its augmenting parts from the whole and dwell for a moment upon their individual means of dramatic communication; those characteristics of words, music, dance and design which, as Madsen expresses it:

"make them capable of creating or contributing to the dramatic experience."⁶

Langer's concept of a virtual reality is an important one here. When referring to the primary illusion created by a work of art, 'illusion' is not intended as an opposition to 'reality', for a work of art is real. Rather it refers to a sense of something more than the sum of materials and elements. In the same way scientists describe mirages, reflections and, indeed, rainbows, which by the standards of material experience are illusory, yet are perceptible realities. Adopting the scientific term, Langer suggests that the primary illusion of any art is a virtual reality; not something unreal. In the musical theatre the virtual realities of the four component arts operate at a secondary level, since the primary illusion must be the virtual reality created by all drama. Let us then examine the extra-dramatic aspects of our four component arts which imbue them with qualities of expression that can both help and hinder the creation of a musical theatre language.

Words

Turning first to words, we can perceive that they are made up of single or multiple sounds which, through the evolution of language and common usage, have attained meaning. In literature, those sounds are converted into visual symbols, but in the theatre they

exist only in the realm of sound, spoken by actor and heard by audience. Artistic elements are created from words by the rules of grammar and the structuring of sentences, phrases and so on. Certain structurings suggest images through their patterns, and we recognise some of these patterns as figures of speech - simile, metaphor, and so on. Figures of speech are ways of employing words that suggest ideas and images beyond the primary or literal meaning. The ability to create new images is the key to artistic selection.

In literature, the word is written, or rather, has been written, according to our perception at the time of reading. Our aesthetic reception here is primarily visual, and by deciphering meaning from visual symbol we understand. But what is created when words are turned from mere signifiers into literature? The primary illusion is one of a 'virtual past'. Literature takes the concepts of character and context and, even in a flow-of-consciousness work like Joyce's *ULYSSES*, the impression created is of a world past, a sense of history. Even literature that is futuristic suggests a virtual past. Its tense is not future, but future perfect; events have already taken place in the artist's mind, and our perception is of looking back and learning of what will have happened.

The use of words in the theatre employs this sense of a virtual past extremely well, especially when allied to the central figure of the performer. Character is enriched through history, the past contingent upon present lives even as we, the audience, witness the action before us. This virtual past and its happy alliance with the theatrical portrayal of character have led to a not-often-challenged assumption that all 'good' theatre will use words, though a visit to any mime show will demonstrate that it simply isn't true.

Nevertheless, an emphasis on words as central to drama has persisted in the U.K. since the recognition of the flowering of the British theatre during the Elizabethan and Jacobean period. The genius of Shakespeare has led to a bias in the British view which still dominates today, when the playwright holds a particularly venerated position and new plays are eagerly sought by virtually all companies from the National to the smallest fringe group. By contrast, the European tradition of theatre is much more physically based and centred upon the performer rather than the writer. The American theatre has always been a mixture of the two traditions, allied to its own cultural expression, a fact that is not coincidental in the development of the modern musical theatre.

In the musical theatre, words assume a place of importance only equal to that of the other media, hence much of the difficulty of recording the totality of a musical show. Equally true is that the emphasis on the word in the musical (as in all theatre) is centred upon the performer. Words as literature are no longer perceived as visual symbols, but return to their primary function of sound, through speech.

Clearly, words operate in relation to both the aesthetic polarities we noted in our overall model. In terms of credibility, we are able to understand words through our intellectual faculty, our mode of rationality, but more important in the musical theatre is the ability of the word to operate as pure sound, capable of affecting the human organism viscerally and without conscious interpretation. This quality is most easily appreciated in words we identify as onomatopoeia, but writers are able to structure whole sentences and create significant imagery through the use of sound patterns, suggesting a rise and fall. In the theatre, as expression of character, such patterns are able to express inner states of emotion. For the writer in musical theatre, this aural mode of the word is crucial, especially to the lyric writer, whose job is to ally the word to music in the convention of song. In the next chapter we shall examine the guiding principles for the

lyricist in establishing song as a conventional means of expression in the musical theatre, but for now we should note only that an awareness of the two modes of aesthetic operation of the word is vital to the writer of musicals, in alliance with an understanding of the revelation of character through verbal expression and the creation of a virtual past.

All too often, writers have failed to pay attention to one or more of these properties with the result that transitions from spoken word to lyric are abrupt, or that lyric and dialogue styles are different, or that words function as display without being rooted in character. Our examination of shows from the last thirty years will provide ample evidence of both sound and not-so-sound uses of the word in musical theatre: from the marvellously crafted street-talk created for WEST SIDE STORY to the colloquial anarchy of language in HAIR, the range of verbal function and arrangement is vast.

Finally, we should note the emphasis in the musical theatre upon non-literal modes of presentation: music, dance and design playing an equal part in the conceptual process. In terms of both creation and criticism there is always the danger of succumbing to the tyranny of the word; allowing our discursive mode of understanding to

take precedent over our visceral perception. In the non-musical theatre for too long writers and critics have fallen foul of this tyranny, considering drama as literature rather than as performance. In the musical theatre such a fault would be to completely misunderstand the workings and potential of the form.

Music

The key to our understanding must be the word 'musical' in our label for the form, for it is the alliance of music to the needs of drama that fundamentally affects the form and its powers of expression, making it distinct from the non-musical theatre. The art of music is essentially an art of motion, though it is movement discarnate, given substance only by being united in time with silence.

Its basic material is sound, and artistic elements are created by the ordering of sounds in time and in relation to silence. The method of sound production has created the concept of musical colour, the arrangement of tones in time creates musical phrases and, in a similar manner to the evolution of meaning in language, recognised forms. Above all, music is a temporal art. But the time we perceive is not literal clock time; rather it is a sense of time as we experience it

organically, the ebb and flow of life. In accord with the facility of the word for creating rises and falls in poetic form, music is linked to our sense of passage; as Langer calls it "a virtual time".⁸ This 'virtual time' quite clearly affects its potential in dramatic terms and we shall see how this property has influenced the musical theatre as a social function, but more significantly at this point we should note its unique quality of existence as a purely aural art, fixed by principles radically different from those of its sister arts. Oscar Brockett writes:

"We value music not so much for what it 'says' as for what it does to us. It may calm or excite. Whenever it engages our attention, we are bound up in it and respond to its rhythmic patterns consciously or unconsciously. The more completely our attention is engaged the less we are conscious of other factors outside of the musical experience..."⁹.

For these reasons it is not surprising to find music the least able to work in harmony with drama for the purpose of creating a theatrical experience. In addition, we have only to look at the strict rules of music theory to appreciate that:

"music is potentially less a partner than a dictator."

As Madsen points out:

"it is the art upon which the musical theatre places the severest limitations of creativity."¹⁰

Most of the controls imposed upon the free-wheeling nature of music originate from the need for intelligibility. Testament to this fact is the way in which musical theatre composers have adhered to the familiar, time-tested, overall characteristics of the musical materials of Western civilisation; rhythm, melody, harmony and tone. In line with its popular roots, this adherence has been centred upon the simplest of song forms and the employment of the basic seven-toned diatonic scale, with its implicit suggestion of keys and harmonic relationships.

In purely musical terms, the twentieth century has seen bold experiments in musical language, some of which even dispense with the Western fundamentals of the 'well-tempered' system, comprising twelve equidistant semitones between a note and its octave. In addition music has developed a greater freedom of rhythmic and harmonic interrelationships, with a wider acceptance of the significance of asymmetry and dissonance. Only in the field of contemporary opera have these musical developments been deployed in theatrical terms, and even then there have been few notable achievements.

Madsen maintains that this is primarily due to the slow process of cultural conditioning:

"To introduce alien patterns of sound through the medium of the musical theatre would result in severely disturbing our learned reactions to the musical experience and subsequently distract from the theatrical one."¹¹

Clearly audience expectation and 'learned reactions' are crucial to a composer writing for the theatre, but there are more than a few examples, especially in the work of Stephen Sondheim where exploration of new musical language has occurred to great theatrical effect, even though audiences at first may have been resistant to an alien sound.

More important than cultural conditioning however, is the fact that in any theatrical presentation, all thought must be dramatic thought. As we have noted, music is only an expression in service of the Book in the musical theatre. At root, what is significant thought to the drama may not be significant in purely musical terms. When it is not, banality occurs; in truth, has occurred over and over again.

In reality, a musical 'thought' is simply a series of tones, related to each other in time in purely musical terms creating a 'motif', and assuring it intelligibility as a unity. The crux of the matter is

how such a motif achieves the power to communicate concrete, significant images; in simple terms, can music have meaning?

The question of meaning in music is one over which scholars have frequently argued. Langer goes so far as to suggest that the question is at the heart of the whole theory and philosophy of art, and from it, she develops her concept of virtual reality.¹² Many argue that music has only achieved meaning through cultural conditioning and learned association, but Langer argues against this most persuasively. Our response to music is not primarily through memory by emotional association, but by our perception of virtual time:

"Our direct experience of time is the passage of vital functions and lived events, felt inwardly as tensions - somatic, emotional and mental tensions, which have a characteristic pattern."¹³

Bernstein, throughout his book, The Unanswered Question, similarly argues against the theory of learned association.¹⁴ In such a light, music is not capable of meaning in discursive terms, but is something felt, and understanding is possible only through visceral perception. To those concerned with the implications of this question for the musical theatre, an answer is compulsory and pre-ordained. Music has no meaning of its own. All musical thought must be harnessed to

dramatic thought. Nevertheless, music retains its potency of expression, its unique ability to directly affect the organism to the exclusion of all else. Musical dramatists forget this at their peril, hence the absolute necessity for choosing thematic material with an eye and ear to its musical nature. Madsen expresses it neatly:

"...in reciprocation for music's subjugation to it's rule, the theatre is devoutly obligated not only to respect the boundaries and uniqueness of this expressivity, but to use it only in accordance with the laws of supply and demand."¹⁵

Ultimately, music must be at the heart of the musical theatre, and its characteristics fully understood if valid expression is to be achieved. Clearly, music's ability for direct communication establishes it as a presentational art, as opposed to a representational one. As Schopenhauer noted:

"music is by no means like the other arts, the copy of Ideas...This is why the effect of music is more powerful and penetrating than the other arts, for they speak only of the shadows, while it speaks of the thing itself."¹⁶

Hence, its theatrical effect is one of impression rather than expression. It is this feature, above all others, through which music helps to furnish the musical theatre with its unique character. The rise and fall of music may well be harnessed to the structure of dramatic

thought, but its ability to create immediate and transient impression, particularly impressions of emotional experience, provides an unselfconscious second-life within the theatre. Motifs may well be conventionally established as representative of particular themes, characters or symbols inherent in the Book, but by employing music on the metaphoric level of impression, it takes the drama where it cannot venture through words alone. As Joseph Kernan explains:

"...in spite of all the flexibility and clarity of poetry, even the most passionate of speeches exists on a level of emotional reserve that music automatically passes. Music is direct, profound and simple in the presentation of emotional stages or shades."¹⁷

In spite of the fact that music is capable of representing natural sounds through musical effects, it may only do so if the idea of those natural sounds is introduced by the dramatic idea. Its far greater power in dramatic terms is therefore not in relation to initiating linear development, but providing texture on a latitudinal plane. In effect music can provide a complete subtextual life to the drama: It can expand or contradict ideas embedded in words or actions and provide a multi-dimensional mode of expression; it is capable also of ordering simultaneous expression such that it is comprehensible, which words spoken simultaneously could never do. A fine example of the

latter is the quintet at the end of Act One of WEST SIDE STORY when the Jets, the Sharks, Anita, Tony and Maria each express their hopes and fears for the coming evening when the rival gangs are due to meet in the Rumble. The ensemble perfectly contrasts the driving energy of the two gangs with Anita's Latin passion and the two lovers' lyrical happiness, yet at the same time promotes a rising anticipation in the audience as to what will actually happen. It remains one of the pinnacles of musical theatre achievement.

Of course, learned associations do come into play, especially when linked to conventions of musical expression used, and often abused by the musical theatre. Nevertheless, we must not forget that music in the musical theatre most often receives its associative imagery from words in the form of song. Once again, music finds itself restrained by the needs of the drama, yet conversely it achieves a considerable new freedom in song's focus on the direct expression of character in action through melody created as a vocal line. This produces, as Aaron Copeland explains:

"a greater sense of freedom and direct personal expression than a complicated web of sound."¹⁸

With the addition of the tonal colour available to the composer through the orchestra we can see that music

is capable of providing a great depth of texture for its theatre, particularly in the guise of emotion, psychology, atmosphere and mood, - in total, the subtext. This subtext is crucial to the actor for it provides the key to the process of translating musical composition, with all its rigidity of structure and abstract mode of communication, to the corporeal, spontaneous world of the performer as character in action. Hence, in spite of the seeming antagonism of the arts of music and drama, reconciliation is possible through the understanding that in the musical theatre, the power of music must be harnessed to expression through the central figure of all theatre - the performer.

Dance

Where music is a discarnate art at root, dance is completely the opposite, able to exist only through the physical dynamic of the human body. In that, it has a natural alliance with the art of the theatre. However, there are equally clear differences. We can see, for example, that dance is basically non-verbal. By not availing himself of speech, the dancer, as John Martin explains:

"...strips his material to the bone; he presents the essence of his experience and not the full memory of it. His action has design of itself, where the actor's design is incidental to a larger purpose....The dancer creates the drama through the metakinetic quality of his movements, where the actor interprets the drama that already exists."¹⁹

This metakinetic quality is what Langer calls:

"a realm of interacting powers....a virtual force",²⁰

while Rudolph Laban defines it as a:

"manifestation of those inner forces out of which the complications of human happenings grow."²¹

The basic tools for creating this manifestation are rhythm, dynamic, spatial relationship and gesture. Of these, only the last is capable of a semblance of literalness, being, as it is, an idiomatic language of movement. On the level of gesture alone, dance shares many of the features of mime; the performer articulating character and context through gestural use of the body. However, unrelieved sequences of gesture in dance are rare, and, indeed, the development of contemporary dance out of the world of ballet has emphasised the abstract over literal gesture in articulating the 'inner forces' of dance.

The way in which dance is dramatic is in many ways similar to the rise and fall of music, but the mode of

reception is primarily visual rather than aural. On that level, dance and music are natural allies, for audiences have always been willing to forego a literal imitation of life for a stylised, abstract expression which, in dance terms, acknowledges:

"the qualitative changes of values."²²

involved in movement, as John Dewey terms it. Madsen expands:

"Every dance audience manifests an acceptance of subjective interpretation and a willingness to be moved kinaesthetically."²³

This 'kinaesthetic' power is carved out of time and space by ordering the movements and tensions of the body in rhythmic and dynamic patterns which relate the dancers to other dancers and to the space around the body. The audience's perception of shifting tensions and contrasting relaxations is what creates the illusion of virtual force. As in music these tensions are again intuitively understood as expression of vital forces.

John Dewey suggests that:

"Near and far, close and distant, are qualities of pregnant, often tragic import..... that is, they are experienced, not just stated by measurement in science."²⁴

Dance's ability to express directly in abstract mode is given intelligibility by repetitious patterns of

alternating accents, or motifs, small patterns that are able to be repeated or developed in a similar manner to a musical motif. This conscious arrangement of patterned stresses and accents is what Agnes De Mille calls:

"the law of dance;"²⁵

for she states:

"it is through the pattern of steps that emotion is transmitted."²⁶

The capacity of dance to transmit emotion is clearly the crucial factor in its suitability for dramatic employment, and again emphasises its close relationship with music. It is little wonder that dance is rarely seen unaccompanied by music. Admittedly, there are breaks in the music for unaccompanied sequences in some tap-dancing, but in effect the rhythmic sound made by tap shoes is its own percussive accompaniment.

However, dance differs starkly from music in its application to the musical theatre, for music plays its largest part when allied to words and is subject to the demands which such an alliance imposes. Dance is equally subject to the demands of the drama, in that it must be rooted in character in action, but it must be

clearly understood that its employment is most effective when permitted an independent existence; that is, when it is allowed to produce an action and not merely underscore an already present idea. To step back a little to the significant contribution Agnes De Mille made to OKLAHOMA !, it is clear that her marvellous ballet in the sequence 'Laurie Makes Up Her Mind', celebrated as it initially was for its meaningful integration with the surrounding story, was in reality dance reiterating the thematic line. Consequently, it was fraught with overt gesture by the necessity to refer back to the story line. Jerome Robbins' gangland warfare in WEST SIDE STORY, on the other hand, is the action and thus free to explore and invent purely through the terms of its own idiom.

Given such freedom, the transmission of emotion is not confined to sentiment or mood alone. As Madsen writes:

"the subjective nature of dance releases it from the responsibility of plausibility."²⁷

When its full range of possibilities is admitted, the theatre benefits from a gamelike freedom which helps to accommodate its heterogeneity of effects. In the game, Viola Spolin tells us:

"...it is understood during playing that a player is free to reach the game's objective in any style he chooses. As long as he abides by the rules of the game, he may swing, stand on his head, or fly through the air. In fact, any unusual or extraordinary way of playing is loved and applauded by his fellow players."²⁸

The rules of the game in the musical theatre are those of the dramatic idea embodied in the Book, and, so long as this is served, dance is assured a greater freedom and intelligibility in a way not always accessible to its autonomous form. The fullest understanding and use of this gamelike freedom has proved highly significant in the development of the musical theatre, especially in terms of staging, and it is capable of helping to bring to light extraordinary resources of synthesis, either in harmony with or contrast to the other effects and modes of expression employed by the form.

Two significant examples of dance's power to effect dramatic synthesis are to be found in two of the most influential shows of the last thirty years. In *COMPANY*, as Bobby and a girl climb into bed, intent on the consummation of their brief relationship, they disappear from our sight even as we strain to see what is happening, and our eyes meet with the implausible appearance of a radiant young woman in a red dress. Nevertheless the dance she performs is utterly credible, for to the surging melody of the love song, augmented by

sighs and comments from the invisible lovers, the free jazz-rock dance turn her into a dervish exuding sexuality, even though the dance is completely free from literal gesture. The breathless tension and mood of sensuality left at her equally sudden disappearance could not have been attained had we been left alone with the lovers. Likewise, dance provides individual moments of dramatic synthesis in A CHORUS LINE, most notably when Cassie asks her former lover and director (who is casting the show) to consider her seriously for a place in the chorus. Her dance to 'The Music And The Mirror' not only expresses her inner need to return to dancing, but also her need to return to him, as she confronts both herself and him with multiple mirror images of her dazzling and freewheeling jazz dance. However, A CHORUS LINE is all the more remarkable, since dance becomes the metaphor for the entire show. Without setting, other than the stage of an audition, the company are able to transport us to significant moments in their lives - first dance class, 'At The Ballet', the school yard, family homes, first auditions, the High School of the Performing Arts, and many other places, purely through the means of dance, conveying at once both place, past and the inner hopes, fears and desires of all the characters.

Ultimately, dance's life in the musical theatre may operate on the level of action, of emotion, of decoration, of intensification, or none of these. Dance, as we might recognise it in terms of patterns of steps, may not be utilised as its own voice, but the understanding of the powers of dance, of ordering the movement of the human body in relation to space and other bodies is a crucial element in the overall process of dramatic synthesis. In that sense, dance is inherent in our definition of musical theatre, even though the word itself never appears.

In many respects, the word 'musical' suggests the application of the principles of dance to staging in the musical theatre. Any staging that reflects and enhances the ordering of time through metric articulation in music could be considered dance. In that sense dance is as vital to the musical theatre as music, and is at the root of our understanding of synthesis.

Design

The other of the four media not specifically referred to in our definition is that of design. Design is the arrangement of the plastic elements of production - light, space, and materials - into artistic elements of shape and mass. Design like dance, is visual in its mode of reception, but design is fundamentally static

where dance is created through motion. It is, of course, possible for design to be mobile, but it is not motion which is primary in our perception - rather it is successive moments of stasis. In effect, design converts real space and materials into a 'virtual space', suggesting a physicality beyond reality.

Design may be representational in mode, and indeed, its alliance with drama has predominantly used this mode, creating settings in naturalistic vein, but the twentieth century has seen major advances in the idea of abstract art, both as visual art and in relation to theatre design. As visual art, two or three dimensional, design orders its elements and provides intelligibility through our perception of the relationships and tensions between line, shape and mass as well as tone and texture. In the theatre, of course, the central figure, the performer, is corporeal, and thus, even when two-dimensional design is used, we are firmly in a three-dimensional world.

The twentieth century has seen the blossoming of a pluralistic approach to theatre and, of necessity, to theatre design. Not only has there been concern with the creation of three-dimensional setting of environment for the performer, but there has been a significant re-addressing of the fundamental spatial relationship

between performer and audience. No longer is the theatre bound by set spatial relationships which may dictate the creation of a performance; rather, the artist is able to conceive a performer/audience relationship which is most suitable to the dramatic idea. There are numerous examples of theatre in the round, in thrust staging, promenade performance and environmental production. The musical theatre has been slow to explore these avenues, though forays have been made as we shall see, not least in Hal Prince's staging of CANDIDE at the Brooklyn Academy in 1973.

However, there are sound practical reasons why such experiments are more difficult in the musical theatre, not least the relationship between performers and musicians. On the level of design's contribution to the musical theatre whole, it is the relationship between music and design which provides the key to our understanding. In all theatre, designers must understand not only the representational quality of design but also the presentational one, where plastics become symbolic. As a writer, Ibsen was one of the first naturalistic authors to consciously explore the symbolic value of setting and properties, but at its most abstract, visual art in the theatre can be as directly affecting as music and dance, with the play of

light and shadow upon line, mass and space. Such an abstract concept of design allows the designer complete freedom to interpret the dramatic ideas and enhance the inherent qualities of performance without resort to literal representation of real environments. Design in the theatre discovers its own logic in the same way as dance does.

With music at the heart of the musical theatre, and being totally presentational in its mode of expression, design must clearly be harnessed to that quality. One of the first designers to recognise this fact was Adolphe Appia, in his commentary on the staging of Wagner's music-dramas. Richard Kennaugh, in an unpublished dissertation,²⁹ is admirably lucid on how Appia's vision has influenced almost every aspect of design for the theatre during this century. Appia clearly understood that the demands of music-drama were concerned with direct presentation of inner emotion. His concept of design centred upon the arrangement of mass and line to merely suggest the literal setting of a scene and, through changing light upon the setting, with its variables of colour, directional focus and intensity reflect the rise and fall of inner tensions suggested by the music and 'danced' by the performer, moving in relation to the space. He writes:

"When stage pictures take on spatial forms dictated by the rhythms of music, they are not arbitrary but on the contrary have the quality of being inevitable," 30

and marks out four elements of theatre design, the action, the floor, the setting and light. Above all he concludes:

"Light and light alone has the greatest plastic power, for it is subject to a minimum of conventions and so is able to reveal vividly in its most expressive form the eternally fluctuating appearance of a phenomenal world."³¹

In particular, it is this approach to the use of light which can directly affect the audience and suggest motion in design when the plastic elements are static. This allows us to talk of rhythm in relation to design and is the key to the synthesising of the design elements with the other arts in the musical theatre. In effect, it allows for the staging of the subtext we hear in the music.

Of course, costume and properties are an equally important factor in design for the theatre, and motion can be literal here since they are directly utilised by actors. Likewise, developments in technology have allowed for actual motion of setting; indeed, such technological innovations have been the inspiration for certain shows in recent years.

The element of spectacle alone can have a visceral effect upon an audience, but it achieves its greatest power in the musical theatre when that spectacle is harnessed to the dramatic idea. There are more than a few examples where spectacle has been expected to carry a scene or a show on its own merits, but this ultimately detracts from the drama and destroys any attempt at dramatic synthesis.

We should be clear that design at its root level does not refer to style, which I shall examine in chapter 5, although visual style may well have an important influence upon the creation of a show. In the theatre, design refers to the total aspect of the ordering of the plastic elements, from performer/audience relationship to the smallest property; the physical environment within which the performer must operate. Fundamentally, it is an awareness of the corporeality of performance; everything to do with that physicality is susceptible to arrangement in expression of the dramatic idea and, as such, must be considered the fourth vital element in our understanding of the foundations of synthesis in the musical theatre.

The Heart Of Dramatic Synthesis In The Musical Theatre

An understanding of the workings of the four media and the way in which they are best able to serve the musical theatre clearly points to certain natural alliances. Music and dance, for example, or music and words, or dance and design. Yet these alliances, and others, are each unique expressions in their own right as well. The problem of synthesis is how the properties of these media and the shifts of emphasis from one mode of expression to another can be arranged to create a single unity, rather than a hybrid, disjointed form that lacks intelligibility. In other words, what properties are common to each of the media which also are in accord with the inherent properties of dramatic expression? The answer lies in the primary emphasis of musical theatre on the Book.

The Book, as we have noted, embodies the dramatic concept of the show and its theatrical presentation. In many respects, it is the book's role as catalyst for presentational expression that is its most significant feature. Yet the central dramatic idea, though suggesting expression through the musical theatre form, is fundamentally no different from the dramatic idea at the centre of any performance. All drama, as Langer suggests, creates a virtual future, ³² a sense of

destiny, once more related to our inner experience of time, and any actor knows the importance of 'timing' in the theatre. Yet in the non-musical theatre the dramatic structuring is governed by the actor's freedom to create the impression of spontaneity; that is, an actor may actively govern the way an audience experiences the rises and falls of the drama in relation to time. In the musical theatre however, the sense of time is geared to the rigid structures that music is capable of imposing upon the drama, and the question of structuring the dramatic idea in the Book becomes a far greater concern to the musical dramatist rather than to the performer.

All dramatic structuring is linked inextricably with the idea of rhythm. With the Act as the fundamental abstraction of all drama, the placing of successive Acts or 'moments' in relation to each other, and the reactions to those moments which in turn initiate new ones, create in drama a shape or structure, allowing for climaxes and releases, and the subsequent conventions which spring from their use. In the musical theatre, the dramatic shape and the musical structures chosen to present that shape must be in accord if the audience is to understand the ideas of the Book. The formal regulation of beats in time which music demands places great responsibility in the hands of the musical

dramatist, for a misjudged alliance of musical and dramatic time will create incongruity and lessen the effect for the audience. All too often we see numbers which last ten minutes musically, where the dramatic moment merits a tenth of that time, for example, or we perceive in the music an urgency where the drama demands a release. Ultimately, the Book must suggest a single dramatic rhythm - one shape, to which all four of the media must be subject.

Words and design are clearly utilised in this way by all drama, but music and dance as primary modes of expression are unique to the musical theatre in the expression of dramatic shape. Our examination of the media clearly demonstrates how each expressive mode is subject to rhythmic structuring. When their rhythms are in direct line with the dramatic rhythm, then successful synthesis is achieved.

Of the element of rhythm and its agent of expressivity - tempo - Styan says:

"Tempo is not a polish on the surface of the action: it is an intrinsic element in its whole structure... Do not see it as a garnish of variations of speed: tempo must reside in the author's conception or nowhere.... Once a rhythm has been felt, then a powerful source of feeling has been called upon. Rhythm always exists to evoke feeling."³³

Of the four media, music is the most rigid in its rhythmic structuring, and, as such, the most difficult to harness to the demands of dramatic structure, where the other three media have an ability to add to and enhance music in its theatrical application. Thus, acknowledging music's centrality in the musical theatre, structure is no longer simply dramatic structure but Musico-dramatic structure, governed by principles quite distinct from those of the non-musical theatre.

David Hirst³⁴ stresses the importance of musico-dramatic structuring in the analysis of musical theatre, and in the next chapter I shall identify the conventions which have been established over the years that allow for the intelligibility of such structure. When such structure is disciplined in form by the idea of a single rhythmic line, all elements of the production, no matter how presentational in mode, attain their own logic. Where the single rhythmic line successfully sustains the aesthetic of discovery, the presentational quality of the media employed is able to achieve expressivity on the level of the aesthetic of opulence. The emphasis of the non-musical theatre on cohesion through the sense of verbal language no longer applies, and an audience is free to enter a world of direct feeling, where any mode of expression is valid in the service of the vital rhythm at the heart of the drama. Madsen suggests that:

"if this theatre does reach roots, it does so then, through the kinetic complicity of this rhythmic motive and the audience's acute though unconscious empathy with it."³⁵

Rhythm then, is the musical theatre's means to a consistency of expression and its discipline of form as well. It also becomes the second means by which we may evaluate the artistic merit of a show. Not only must we assess the aptness of artistic selection in terms of expressive mode, but also in relation to the overall musico-dramatic shaping of the rhythmic line. In the musical theatre, where rhythm is encountered in the extremes of its manifestation, the means by which it articulates an audience's sense of expectation through pattern and shifting modes of expression must be conscientiously considered as each element is added to the work in process. Thus, each show has a rhythmic life that is a complete entity.

From a directorial point of view, Hustoles notes that:

"a director must find the tensions, the total rhythm of the show."³⁶

In examining the developing role of the musical theatre director over the last thirty years, we shall see how the demands of music and dance have made his job

fundamentally different from that of the non-musical theatre director and how the idea of the director/choreographer is related to the concept of rhythm as the key to the process of synthesis.

With such a rigorous demand made by the rhythmic line of a musico-dramatic structure, shifts of emphasis from one expressive medium to another must be made with as little disruption to the flow as possible. The next chapter will examine how conventions have arisen to deal with the problem and equally, how these conventions have in themselves become enemies of synthetic process.

Weales notes the danger:

"When the transition from dialogue to song, or from song to dance, fails to seem natural, whether the fault is in the writing or the staging, the total effect of the musical is splintered and the listener senses it, even if he takes pleasure in the splinters."³⁷

Such comment is sound, but is, in some respects, rooted in a school of thought that calls the process of synthesis 'integration'. As Weales seems to demand that all transitions should seem "natural", so 'integration' suggests that all musical theatre seeks to deny its own presentationalism. Shows of the last thirty years have seen many fine examples which have done exactly the opposite, and though modes of expression have been used simultaneously in contrast, the effect, in creating

dislocation, has nevertheless been appropriate to the dramatic idea and rhythmic line. Integration suggests a totally harmonious, non-dislocating approach to synthesis and thus, limits the potential of the musical theatre by its very usage. However, the word is not coincidentally similar to the word 'integrity' and in that sense, the observance of the demands of synthesis are at the heart of the integrity of the musical theatre in its consideration as art.

Ultimately, in relation to the musical theatre, not in conceptual terms, but as a living entity in performance, Appia is still the keystone to our understanding, conceiving of a unification of all the media in relation to rhythmic line, and Shelton goes so far as to subtitle her study of the musical, An Expressive Development Of Adolphe Appia's Theories Of Theatre Synthesis.³⁸. When applied to the musical theatre, the result should be that:

"the orchestrations sound the way the costumes look,"³⁹

as Richard Rodgers so colourfully puts it.

When fully realised, an audience is never aware of the synthetic process or of the differing media which are synthesised, only of the dramatic idea powerfully expressed and perceived through feeling in the

chimerical world created. At such a peak of achievement, as Wagner saw it:

"Art conceals art."⁴⁰

Or rather, art conceals craft, for the understanding of synthesis is crucial to the development of craft in the musical theatre artist.

Of course, it would be most advantageous academically if we were able to say that the idea of rhythmic unity is a consciously applied principle of the musical. In truth, its evocation is simply one of those accidental offspring born of the enigmatic quality we call talent. An author does not comprehend rhythm as he does idea, or action, or character. It evolves out of an innate sense of kinetic appropriateness as he selects his means of expressing these other things. In the case of the musical theatre, moreover, where the artist is frequently a collaboration of many talents, this evolutionary process is necessarily slower, often not completely realised until after the first public showing. Much of the trial and error process so often discussed with regard to the opening of a new musical derives from this very search for appropriateness. In actuality the nature of rhythmic design is more of a horse-after-the-cart process than a conscious principle.

If however, we respect its elemental position in the structuring and employment of expressive media, we will realise that, though the effects may reach a stage life before it, their continued existence is guaranteed only by their abeyance to its eventual controlling force. Once again, there are numerous examples of where an effect has been employed for its own sake and never been subjected to the demands of the rhythmic entity, resulting in superfluous expression and a restless audience.

Finally, when viewed in this manner, it is possible for us to consider all conventions of musical theatre expression as being of a utilitarian nature, existing only to serve and enhance this central force, the force which governs the very concept of synthesis in the musical theatre. That musical theatre is a presentational mode of expression governed by convention is clear. When different expressive media are subject to the principles of synthesis in the musical theatre a new language is born.

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CHAPTER 4

CONVENTION AND TRADITION

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CONVENTION AND TRADITION

All art forms utilise conventions in employing different media for the purpose of significant expression. Up to this point, most of the discussion concerning the musical theatre has dealt with the media responsibility for the musical theatre synthesis in relatively conceptual terms; but once the essential performer is introduced, matter achieves form and theory must give way to description. The performer's physicality demands an equal manifestation of substance from any instrumentality at his command, and words, music, dance and design must now be assessed as living partners of the theatre. With their life and the means to its actualisation come the bulk of the problems which each musical theatre work must face and counter in its formative stages if it is to achieve a true synthesis. In facing the problems presented, the musical theatre has discovered artistic conventions and principles of craft responding to the need for a balance of effects.

Some philosophers have argued that perception is not a factor in the significance of Art, but this is an argument that will not be, cannot be conjoined by the dramatic artist. Denied any one of its tripartite

members - performer, material or audience - the theatre is incapable of realising itself as Art; indeed, some would say it does not exist at all. In levels of interaction between its three elements, the theatre is rooted in a common experience, and certainly the process as a shared collective one, is more complex than individual appreciation of a piece of music or a painting for example. In other arts perception is encouraged to enjoy a great freedom of individual interpretation. Certain features will impress different individuals, but in the theatre the assembled number becomes a group mind subject to the temporal and spontaneous imagery of theatrical performance, and bringing to the experience all the senses, fully expectant that all will be fulfilled through comprehensible means. Intelligibility is the fulcrum upon which the balance of effects rests and convention is discovered in employing different media in the service of dramatic art. It is the need for intelligibility that makes convention in art a necessity; in short, a convention is a discovered device of expression, whose use is accepted by both artist and audience alike, in making a work of art intelligible.

Conventions are discovered by artists and, when successful, are utilised time and again in articulating their ideas, frequently becoming traditions, utilised

out of habit rather than necessity. It is all too easy to lose sight of the reasons why traditions have developed; the initial expedience to which they were conventional answers is no longer visible to us. Certain conventions become prototypal traditions, but the artist's responsibility is to rediscover the necessity for conventions every time there is an act of creation.

The theatre has responded to the need for intelligibility by conventions such as the raised platform. the projection of voice and gesture, the darkened auditorium, the condensation of action and so on, but it is equally true that such conventions are not always utilised. There are plenty of examples where actor/audience relationships have been altered in order to create more suitable conventions of dramatic expression. Yet, the varying manipulations of the theatre's corporeality become perfectly acceptable to all participants in the theatrical experience, ordering the physicality of the available media to allow significant dramatic expression.

In the musical theatre, as I have shown, the media employed have a direct effect upon the range of expression, and in the means to their theatrical employment lies the basis of conventions unique to the musical.

In examining the musical theatre, it is vital to understand the distinction between convention and tradition, and here we come to the significance of historical viewpoint. The history of musico-dramatic forms is, in fact, a history of its attempts to come to compatible, productive terms with, while remaining in control of, its stubbornly autonomous expressive media. Over the centuries it has explored countless means by which to make peace between the extraordinary effects contributed by song and dance and their corollary disruptive effects to 'drama proper'. If it has not always been able to use these voices in other than a decorative way, it has at least succeeded in making their presence acceptable to its viewers. Due to the repeated use of certain conventions and the loss of the original necessity for them, many of the conventions we associate with the modern musical theatre appear whimsical; as if they once felt 'right' to somebody and have endured through entropy ever since. If there has been any direct evolution of the musical theatre it lies in the significance of those moments when an artist discards an established convention and invents another. This is reflected in the fact that almost all historically based studies from critics and scholars of the musical theatre have tended to equate evolution and revolution. If, however, we look at those shows noted

for their 'revolutionary' rejection of certain conventions (SHOWBOAT, OKLAHOMA! or HAIR for example), the basic similarities between them and the companion works of their times are far greater than their superficial differences. What is vital to understand is that the artists in each case did not 'revolt' against the essential conventions of balancing effects, but against the devices, the tricks, and the formulae by which other artists had learned to articulate them. Moreover, so acceptable and expected had these devices become to the popular audience, that they seemed inseparable from elemental conventions.

The lines between convention and device, essence and accessory, necessity and custom are fine indeed. Yet a delineation between them is crucial for an understanding of the theatre they help make communicable. This study's examination of shows from the last thirty years rests in that understanding, for the range of work demonstrates many examples of works which have both utilised prototypal traditions and discovered new means of articulating their living media across all four bands of our musical theatre spectrum. Stephen Sondheim, pragmatic as ever, is quick to point out that the rejection of certain conventions does not necessarily make a show more important than one which utilises established forms of articulation:

"What is it makes a show more important? New conventions may make it more influential, but not more important".¹

Thus questions of conventional expression are crucial to our understanding of the potential range of musical theatre, but are not bases for value judgement in themselves.

Naturally, conventions in employment of the differing media, like the expressive qualities of the media themselves, operate on all four levels of the musical theatre spectrum. Subsequently, the different conventional uses operate between the two polarities of credibility and display, and the need for balance is all, governed by the rule of intelligibility. When this is achieved, a consistency of style follows. I shall return to the question of style in the next chapter, but for now we must examine both essential conventions and prototypal traditions with regard to the musical theatre in performance in order to complete the framework within which we may examine shows of the period 1957 to 1987.

The most fundamental convention of the musical theatre, as implicit in our definition, is that where words and music are combined in the voice of the performer: that is, in song. Kislán notes that:

"the musical theatre is a theatre of convention,"² most essentially in that the audience must accept song as a valid form of human expression. Its whole success rests upon the audience's ability to accept song and dance as meaningful, thereby maintaining the tension between the audience and the dramatic essence of the Book. The fact that they do accept it allows for other conventions to be developed in musical theatre presentation which in no way undermine the dramatic/theatrical experience, but rather enhance it.

We have already seen that crucial to the whole idea of a musical theatre is the acceptance of song as a natural expression of heightened emotion, the fact that the idea must 'sing' in its inception. However, the most significant characteristic of the musical theatre is the convention of adjoining speech, song and dance. In opera, the musical convention applied is that of tonality, a continuous musical sound, which can contain action or moments of pure lyricism, yet the continuous tonality provides a unifying force resulting in the impression of a single voice. However, meaning falls victim to this practice, for it is a quickly learned fact for the musical dramatist that not everything can be sung. As Calvin Brown points out in discussing the opera SIEGRIED:

"If it is difficult for an actor to pretend to die and speak at the same time without appearing ludicrous, what can poor Siegfried do when he has to sing a long passage with a spear sticking between his shoulder-blades..... and presumably into his lungs?"³

If, as in musical theatre, the principles of dramatic veraciousness are applied, much of the action in opera can seem ludicrous, and the musical theatre has sought to avoid such inadequacy of artistic selection by committing itself to the service of the dramatic core of the Book, even if it has not always avoided moments of absurdity.

The emphasis upon the balance between words, (and the intelligibility they can communicate) and the wholly chimerical worlds of song and dance lays bare the essential problem of musical theatre. How to sustain the dramatic shape and drive of the Book without destroying it in transitions from one mode of expression to another? Opera avoids this problem by existing solely in the realm of artificial time created by musical motion. Styan writes:

"The bad play, is one which fumbles its action, sacrifices clarity in its impressions and loses control of its theme."⁴

Yet how can the musical fail to fall into this category when it consistently interrupts the forward

movement of its action with the stop-and-go consequences of the speech-song-dance alliance? If all pacing in the theatre must be dramatic pacing, how can this theatre control its moments of song and dance so that they do not lessen or destroy its momentum?

We have already noted that the rhythmic entity is crucial to the process of synthesis. Historically, the Rodgers and Hammerstein shows are good examples of how the musical tried to tackle this problem through the concept of 'integration' (which, as already pointed out, is not synthesis, merely one example of it). The trend for integration grew out of a move to create a lifelike representation in the musical; a trend towards realism. Yet, the conventions of song developed in the integrated form are quite different from those utilised in vaudeville or the notional musicals of the seventies such as *PACIFIC OVERTURES*, *A CHORUS LINE* or *BALLROOM* which are rooted in a dramatic tradition much closer to anti-illusion, most readily called to mind by the plays and theories of Brecht. We shall see how different concepts of theatrical illusion have affected the development of shows within the last thirty years, particularly with regard to the creation and employment of conventions to unify the different expressive modes. However, there are essential conventions of the use of song in musical theatre which are dictated by the necessity for dramatic intelligibility.

THE CONVENTION & PRINCIPLES OF THE MUSICAL THEATRE SONG

1. Musical Form

Given the centrality of the singing actor to musical theatre, the primary musical idea must be conveyed in the vocal line - words harnessed to melody. This is then fleshed out with accompaniment, providing a subtext to the vocal line. As musical dramatists have put themselves at the service of the total rhythmic entity they have discovered different conventions of song to help create the required effect.

Firstly, the basis of song convention in the musical theatre is the employment of popular song form, not least because of the necessity for immediacy in affecting the audience in the theatre. Popular song form, as it is understood, is the basic structural unit utilised in most songs of all folk cultures throughout the world. As this unit has been formalised by the traditions of Western musical notation, so it is now most frequently found in the 32 bar form, divided into 4 equal units. The first states the main musical idea (theme A); the second restates that theme (A), possibly with a modified ending leading to the third; which is a contrasting though complementary musical idea (theme B); the fourth unit then restates the first theme (A), again

with a possible modified or extended ending, bringing the structure to an end. This form is known as A-A-B-A form. The employment of such a form (and its many variants, including the almost as frequent A-B-A-B form) is valuable to the musical dramatist as one which sits easily upon the ear, is self-contained, has a symmetrical balance in its equal units and yet can be varied in the asymmetry of the A-A-B-A form, provides room for the restatement of the main musical idea in association with the dramatic idea giving memorability to the audience, and provides for contrast in the employment of the B theme or 'release' section. All this can be achieved in just 32 bars of music!

Of course there are many variations upon this structural form, just as there are many different kinds of poetic structure, but the efficiency of the form for theatrical purposes has never been superseded. In addition, because the form has grown from the development of popular culture, it has an immediate and obvious power in setting up an expectancy in the audience which can be turned to effective dramatic use in its fulfilment or in the breach of its promise.

Equally, the laws of music, especially in harmonic terms, when harnessed to this form provide dramatic potential in the same way, most frequently in the

employment of harmonic cadences, (perfect, plagal, imperfect and interrupted, as they are termed). These cadences, or ends of musical phrases provide expectancy or resolution, depending upon the cadence used, and also different emotional colourations. Most frequently the basic diatonic scale is utilised, again to capitalise on the expectancy of the audience. To venture outside these basic musical principles in the musical theatre is to lead the audience into unknown territory, though it has, of course, been done on numerous occasions, frequently creating new conventions.

What must be clear is that in song, this application of musical principles works in alliance with the principles of lyric form, and we will see how the two work in alliance, creating a new form and language out of two of Langer's primary illusions based on words and music.

The basic song form is most frequently used in structural terms as the Refrain (or Chorus) and this is complemented by the Verse, which usually sets up the basic idea of the song and leads us to expect the solidity of the Refrain, both in musical and lyrical terms. The other addition to the song form is the bridge section. Sometimes the Release of the Refrain is known as the Bridge, but more strictly this refers to a

short passage or phrase, often providing a relaxation between Refrains where another full Verse would be inappropriate.

It is important to realise that the application of song form to the theatre has both strengths and drawbacks. On the one hand, its place in our cultural language makes it a perfect vehicle for immediacy of impact and its efficiency of structure and emphasis upon a single melodic line make for compactness of idea and a sense of simple sincerity: on the other, the necessity for serving the developing dramatic idea can mean that song form is too simplistic a structure for expressing the particular moment. One of the most interesting aspects of the developing musical theatre is the way in which musical dramatists have sought to expand the basic song form in order to give greater powers of expression in accord with the specific dramatic moment. For now, it is merely necessary to note that the basic idea of song structure has been the starting point for the development of most of the abiding musical theatre conventions in song.

2. Lyrics.

As the application of basic musical structure of song is harnessed to the demands of the musical theatre, so the theatre makes specific demands upon the lyricist.

Indeed, the art of the lyricist is perhaps the most specific of all the collaborators in the creation of the musical. It is certainly most specific to the form, non-existent in the worlds of 'pure' music or the non-musical stage. This may well give us one reason why the musical theatre is so often termed 'lyric' theatre, (though equally it applies in the broader sense of 'lyrical', that of expressing emotion). It is no surprise that the source of the word 'lyric' is 'lyre', an instrument most often used to accompany the songs of minstrels in Ancient Greece. Most essentially a lyric is always written to be sung. Given that fact, there are two over-riding principles of lyric-writing which have been best summed up by Stephen Sondheim, one of the finest lyricists of the modern musical theatre.⁵

The first principle is that lyrics exist in time. A song marries lyrics to the shape and, more importantly, the tempo of the music, which pushes the lyric along at a pace the listener cannot control (or the performer). A theatre lyric must be grasped and understood the first time through or else you risk losing the thought and probably the audience for the rest of the performance. Thus, a lyricist aims for sense before all other considerations, and must never sacrifice smoothness for cleverness.

Secondly, lyrics are not poetry. Lyrics live on the sound of their music and must therefore be underwritten. Poetical richness in song lyrics is at war with the music, which already conveys richness through melody, harmony and rhythm. Read any musical libretto, and the lyrics look banal; listen to the songs and the feeling contained beneath the seeming banality soars on the wings of song. One only has to look at 'Maria' from WEST SIDE STORY to find a perfect example. At one point of the Bridge section, Sondheim wrote ten times the word 'Maria', which could hardly be called poetry in literary terms, yet Bernstein's music gives a broad, passionate sweep to the song and creates for us a sense of Tony's intoxication with the sound of Maria's name and with her.

Such principles apply to all song writing, but the theatre, concerned as it is with character in action, places further emphasis on the lyric craft. Diction of lyrics, as governed by the rhythm of the music, and the phrasing and rhyme schemes, as governed by the structure of the music, shape the character, tone, development and form of the song as an entity.

Diction is a crucial factor in the theatrical effect of good song lyrics. The lyricist must understand the nature of singing. Sense must be carried

through a whole phrase before breath; writing which demands that sense be carried over a breath is the particular enemy of the singing actor. Likewise, words with consonantal bunching must be given sufficient musical room for articulation. Most importantly, the lyricist must clearly differentiate between open and closed vowel sounds. When the musical phrase is set at the top of the vocal range of the singer, the lyricist must use open vowel sounds, particularly if the dynamic is loud. Closed vowels might be used only if the lyricist wants to suggest inner tension. Likewise, ends of phrases must be conceived to utilise sounds in line with musical shape. Diction, in essence, is rooted in the physiology of singing. Correctly understood it is the vital key to effective theatrical lyrics based on the two basic principles outlined above.

Corollary principles follow. A good song in a musical must generate a type of theatrical moment that cannot be duplicated in the non-lyrical theatre, as 'Maria' certainly does.

The good dramatic songwriter must build subtext into the lyric, for there must be in a musical theatre song something for the actors to act. A good lyric reveals to the audience what the characters could not have the omniscience to know or explain about themselves

with total accuracy. In addition, a lyricist never allows the songwriter to sing through the characters. Revelation is all and its greatest ally is dramatic irony. The score for A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC is laden with songs which reveal in just this way.

The use of rhyme must also be governed by character. Sondheim is himself critical of his own lyric for 'I Feel Pretty' in WEST SIDE STORY. for as he explains:

"The rhyme scheme which goes:

'I feel pretty,
Oh so pretty;
I feel pretty and witty and gay;
And I pity
Any girl who is with me today.'

is far too sophisticated for an uneducated Puerto Rican girl of sixteen."⁶

Essentially rhyme suggests intelligence or education when used by characters. Of course, it is a great asset to the lyricist, for a rhyme focuses attention on the rhymed word, and once a rhyme scheme is set up, it can be harnessed again to satisfying or denying audience expectation, which can be particularly useful in comic songs. Of course, the basic rules of rhyme still apply in a lyric, as in poetry. A true rhyme is one in which the stressed vowel sound is the same, followed by any

number of unstressed syllables the same, but the preceding consonantal sound will be different. For example, 'pain' rhymes with 'gain' and 'beatable' rhymes with 'repeatable'. However, 'Inimitable' does not rhyme with 'inevitable' where the last three syllables are identical but the main stressed vowel does not match. If the preceding consonantal sound is the same, then it is not a true rhyme but an identity, such as 'gain' and 'again'. Identities used in a lyric are not as strong, for they suggest lack of thought.

Rhymes are usually found in relation to musical structure at the point of the cadence, or end of each musical phrase, and generally reflect the thematic structure, hence the rhyme scheme denoted as A-A-B-A. In addition, a good lyricist will use internal rhymes in order to increase the ascension of the lyrical thought and the sense of increasing tempo, as in 'I Feel Pretty':

"I feel pretty and witty and gay."

In the 1987 London production of FOLLIES, Sondheim introduced one of his most sophisticated internal rhymes in a number for the highly sophisticated character of Phyllis during her own FOLLIES number of the mind:

"No one dared to query her superior exterior."

Rhyming of such daring and closeness could be seen as pure display, but here Sondheim has harnessed rhyme to character. Above all, the lyricist is always aware that rhyme depends not upon spelling but upon the pronunciation of words: 'find' and 'wind' may rhyme depending upon the sense of the latter, but 'cough' and 'bough' will never rhyme.

Finally, humour in musical theatre lyrics comes from character in action. In *COMPANY*, Joanne sings "She's tall enough to be your mother", which hardly generates a great deal of enthusiasm on the page, but delivered as a complaint in the context of character, it is a very funny line, not least because of its placing in the overall shape of the song. The placing of lyric for comic effect is vital. A good lyricist will set up a punch line to pay off at exactly the right point of the musical shape by all that goes before it, and ensures that the comic gem is set off most strongly in the correct dramatic context.

What is clear from Sondheim's superbly lucid delineation of the lyric writer's craft is that many of the concerns of the lyricist are those of the non-musical dramatist, but harnessed to the temporal and tonal demands of the laws of music. Where the playwright is free to create his own dramatic rhythm,

the lyricist is always subject to the demands of the music and his craft is one of razor-sharp precision. Economy and clarity are his keywords, and every experienced lyricist knows that the substitution of a 'but' for an 'and' can be enough to change the whole dynamic of a song.

3. The Marrying Of Music And Lyric.

Given that there is such a necessity for interaction and interdependence between music and lyric, both in terms of intention and form, it must be regarded as the quintessential element in the musical dramatist's craft. Any song is an upholder of the principle of assimilation as outlined by Susanne Langer, but when harnessed to the demands of the theatre, it takes on a further level of assimilation, subjugating itself to the life of the drama.

Music and lyrics must always be fashioned together to develop in the same way and to climax together. Not to do so would be to introduce a complexity of expression that would destroy clarity, and is the enemy of theatrical lucidity. Just as the musical structure has a release section, so the lyric mirrors the release in a change of thought, returning to the original thought-line as the music returns to its A- theme. Should the music at the end of the song be extended to

provide a rounding off, so the lyric and thought behind it is extended, often in an after-thought manner as in a musical Coda. In such ways of working together, music and lyric become unified and suitable for harnessing to dramatic impetus.

Most crucially, with song as the central expression of the musical theatre, a song is not an adjunct to a scene, but is the scene itself. It must be a self-contained dramatic moment, almost like a mini one-act play, with a set-up and a development. This is where the demands of drama place a great responsibility on the musical dramatist, for the basic song form would seem restrictive in its opportunity for development, but it is essential that this is understood. In the same way as a scene in a non-musical play must lead forward and advance the ideas of the whole, so a song must take the audience forward in the overall advancement of the musical and not hold it up. All too often the dangers of song in delaying dramatic thrust have been evident, to the detriment of the work in question, yet there are equally many examples of the resourcefulness of musical dramatists in adapting song to particular dramatic purpose.

In relation to character in action, it is important for the song to be rooted in a character's attempt to advance in some way; to solve some dilemma, to rationalise and understand feelings, to change a situation. In so doing, other characters respond and one has the beginnings of a dramatic shape in song. This necessity for subservience to dramatic rhythm has produced many different types of song and conventions for their use in musical theatre.

Certainly, regardless of the type of song, the Layout of the song, (that is, how many Verses, Refrains, Bridges and so on are to be used) will be governed by the rhythmic demands of the dramatic moment. Likewise, the use of the Reprise, in which a song is repeated in whole or in part, should be governed by dramatic effectiveness, though all too often it has been abused, due to the desire on the part of either composers or producers to secure a memorable (if not hit!) song from a score. Notwithstanding this fact, the Reprise can prove a valuable convention in the harnessing of song to drama.

Ultimately, the usages of song have been many and varied in the history of the musical theatre. and will no doubt continue to be developed, but certain dramatic functions have become established, and thus we are able

to identify particular types of song which have become prototypes for many musical dramatists.

4. Song Types.

As in all genres one begins to recognise prototypal traditions by looking at aspects of successful (or otherwise) works. In the world of the modern musical, as Lehman Engel writes, it is necessary:

"to examine, to attempt certain conclusions about, and to help impart what I believe exists as a body of basic principles in the art of musical theatre..... and unlike thirty years ago, models do exist."⁷

More than any other commentator, Engel has tried to distil the information available into a series of workable principles, and his work is particularly recommended to anyone wishing to create in the musical theatre. Certainly his work is rooted in the principles of song as outlined above and he examines a number of well-known shows in his work, mostly from the twenty years preceding the period of this study. Nevertheless, his work and the subsequent vocabulary it has engendered is useful to our understanding of the musical theatre as a whole, and lays the ground for examining much of what has happened from 1957 onwards.

Most significantly he identifies and labels certain prototypal song forms clearly recognised in the shows of

Rodgers and Hammerstein, Irving Berlin, George Gershwin, Frank Loeser, Cole Porter and Lerner and Loewe. Such song types reveal an enormous amount to us about harnessing song to dramatic function. He lists these types as follows:

a) The Ballad

This is most often a love song, though it can be utilised in many different ways. It is most recognisable for its lyricism in the melodic line. A good example of a modern ballad is 'What I Did For Love' from A CHORUS LINE. Usually the tempo is not very fast, though the long sweeping lines of the melody may be accompanied by a driving rhythmic figure, giving added vigour to the emotion expressed, as in 'Tonight' from WEST SIDE STORY. There are also examples of narrative ballads, one such being 'Nothing' from A CHORUS LINE (which also has a rhythmic undercurrent).

In many ways the Ballad is the most appealing kind of song to the musical dramatist with a gift for melody. Ironically, it is also the hardest to introduce dramatically without holding up the flow of the action, and the necessity for picking up the dramatic tempo after a ballad is one of the first crucial lessons for a librettist or musical dramatist. Nevertheless, ballads

are still popular and still manage to make it from their show into the pop charts, as was the case with Jennifer Halliday's rendition of 'And I Am Telling You I'm Not Going' from DREAMGIRLS which made No. 1 in the American charts in the summer of 1982. The lyric of the ballad is perhaps the most simple of all.

b) The Rhythm Song

A song primarily carried along on, or propelled by, a musical beat or rhythmic figure, which is most usually a regular one. Rhythm songs may include ballads (as in 'Tonight') or other kinds of song such as comedy or charm songs (see below). They are particularly useful as songs which give rise to dance, and the score of A CHORUS LINE is full of Rhythm Songs. Likewise, WEST SIDE STORY utilises rhythm numbers as the source for the choreographic portrayal of the gang warfare and the sprung tension of the Jets and the Sharks. Andrew Lloyd Webber, who is most renowned for his lyrical ballads such as 'Memory' from CATS, has written two of the most successful rhythm songs in 'Skimbleshanks, The Railway Cat' from CATS, suggesting the speed and power of a moving train, and in 'The Money Kept Rolling In' with its consistent driving quavers, yet a constantly shifting stress pattern, skilfully depicting the relentless drive to acquire money from the people by Eva Peron in EVITA.

c) The Comedy Song

The Comedy Song is divided into two main and quite opposite forms, each of which has many variants. These forms might be generally classified as the 'short joke' and the 'long joke'. A fine example of the short joke song is 'The Little Things You Do Together' from COMPANY. In it, each musical theme leads to a punch line in the lyric followed by the tag line '... that makes marriage a joy', or some variant on it. The wit in the lyric keeps the audience anticipating the next gag, and the tag line comes after the punch line when the audience may be laughing. In addition the release also sets up its own tag:

"It's not so hard to be married,
It's much the simplest of crimes.
It's not so hard to be married.....
I've done it three or four times!"

The total effect of the song shape is maintained in its ascension by the saving up of the best gag in each Refrain to last, so that the final statement of theme A is also the funniest joke. Sondheim tops this by setting it up so that the final tag line is also particularly ironic and brings an extra laugh.

Long joke songs are rarer not least because they take up more time, and have often been fashioned in a narrative form as in 'The Love Of My Life' from

BRIGADOON. In many respects the long joke song is a hang-over from vaudevillian roots of the musical, and it has largely fallen from fashion, again because of its propensity for delaying the dramatic impetus, though it is still found, most usually now in conjunction with the short joke idea. Two good examples of this are 'Gee Officer Krupke' from WEST SIDE STORY, in which each refrain has its own punch line, but where the end of each section leads to the next, heightening the sense of a somewhat mad social system which passes juvenile delinquents from pillar to post. The total effect of the song is a continuing ascension to the final "Gee, Officer Krupke..... Krupp You!" Similarly in 'Nothing' from A CHORUS LINE, the lyric develops throughout the song until the reversal of the gag at the end when the singer, having been consistently put down by her drama teacher for feeling nothing during many ridiculous games and exercises, hears that he has died and finds herself feeling..... nothing.

The emphasis in the Comedy Song is clearly upon the lyric, though music can in itself produce comedy, and therefore the main musical idea is usually rhythm dominated, the vocal line being shaped to best show off the comedy of the lyric. Almost invariably the lyric comes first in the comic song, as opposed to Ballads and Rhythm songs.

d) The Charm Song

In the Charm Song, music and lyric are of equal importance. The subject matter of the lyric is light, though there is no attempt to make a specific comic point. The musical setting is generally delicate, optimistic and rhythmic, and is likely to have, more than the music of comedy songs, a life of its own independent of the lyric. Rodgers and Hammerstein are generally acknowledged as the masters of the Charm Song and their scores are filled with good examples. Lerner and Loewe's MY FAIR LADY contains a fine example in 'Wouldn't It Be Lovely?'

The show CHICAGO, rooted in the traditions of vaudeville, utilises a Charm Song most successfully in 'All I Care About Is Love', in order to introduce us to the seductive lawyer, Billy Flynn. Its dramatic effect rests upon the ironic use of the Charm Song, for all Billy really cares about is not Love but egocentric satisfaction, whether through blind adoration, financial reward or media attention. In many respects this echoes a trend in musical theatre towards expression of more sophisticated ideas, and away from the direct naivety of the Charm Song.

e) The Musical Scene

The Musical Scene is not a song type as such, but is a kind of theatrical sequence which grew with the trend towards integration. The sequence, of whatever tone or intent, is set to music, for one or any number of characters. It may include a song type as we would recognise it and may be held together formally by its literary structure, guided by a feeling of musical balance. It may also include speech, recitative, song and incidental music (underscoring).

In WEST SIDE STORY, the scene which contains 'A Boy Like That' and 'I Have A Love' is a dramatic Musical Scene. Probably the most famous single Musical Scene is again from Rodgers and Hammerstein in Billy Bigelow's 'Soliloquy' from CAROUSEL, in which lyrical, dramatic and comedic elements are combined. As the musical has developed, some musical dramatists have responded particularly well to the idea of the Musical Scene, for in effect it is the most suited to development of dramatic idea and continuing motion. Stephen Sondheim, in particular, has made it a great strength of his work and both SWEENEY TODD and SUNDAY IN THE PARK WITH GEORGE are full of Musical Scenes as opposed to isolated songs, though both also use song types with great skill.

In essence, the Musical Scene is the mainstay of the musical theatre, and allows for almost completely scored musicals. Even musicals which are totally sung, such as EVITA, are still based in the idea of the Musical Scene and should not be termed operas, for all the reasons we have seen. The direct ancestors of the Musical Scene lie in operettas such as THE DESERT SONG or ROSE MARIE most especially in their Act One Finales, where it is important in dramatic terms to heighten the tension in order to retain audience interest over the interval. In addition to mastering song form and the union of music and lyric, the musical dramatist would be well advised to study the structuring of Musical Scenes.

f) Special Material

Engel identifies this category in order to contain those songs or musical scenes which are created specifically to display the talents of a particular performer or to create a specific unusual dramatic moment. Quite often special material is fashioned in one of the above forms. There are countless examples of where the casting of a particular performer has influenced the creative development of a role. Angela Lansbury in SWEENEY TODD for example, was given material specifically suited to her vocal qualities and talents as a comedienne, where Sweeney himself has almost no

direct comedy. Likewise, Ethel Merman's portrayal of Rose in GYPSY was of significance in the development of the final 'Rose's Turn' sequence.

It is vital to note however, that in both these examples, the development of material for a specific performer in no way lessens the dramatic impact, but rather heightens it. A skilled musical dramatist will always use special material in this way, though there have been plenty of examples of how the abuse of the notion of special material becomes self-indulgent display or a direct commercial ploy rather than enhancing the dramatic line.

There is, under the heading special material, a song known as the eleven o'clock number, which comes towards the end of the show in order to provide a lift to the final scene. This number is frequently focused on the central performer/s, but can also be given to a lesser character in order to provide some form of release or dramatic contrast. In the latter vein, Sondheim wrote 'The Miller's Son' for Petra, the maid in A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC, giving an earthy perspective to the emotional entanglements of the sophisticated central characters. In A CHORUS LINE, the eleven o'clock number is the ballad 'What I Did For Love', though the creators would freely admit that the inclusion of it was always

somewhat awkward in dramatic terms. In CATS it is 'Memory' which serves this function, having been suggested at various points throughout the show and only coming to fruition at this point. Rose's Turn in GYPSY might well be considered an eleven o'clock number even though it is in effect the final scene. Equally, one could make a case for the preceding 'Let Me Entertain You' strip sequence, which denotes Gypsy Rose Lee's rise to the top of her profession as the eleven o'clock number. I include this to show that there are no hard and fast rules about special material of any kind, only a utility to its existence which demands acknowledgement in our recognition of the dramatic function of song.

It is important to realise that some of Engel's categories are based on musical characteristics while others seem more closely related to lyrical ones. Still others are defined by their relationship to the overall dramatic shape of the show. Other commentators and practitioners have added other kinds of identifiable usages of song to Engel's list. Ethan Mordden, in BROADWAY BABIES, sees one strain as stemming from the extravaganzas of the late nineteenth century. At that time, he explains, Broadway's great events were not rooted in the craft of authorship, but in the big number of a show. As in the Sextet 'Tell Me Pretty Maiden' from FLORADORA (1899), he writes:

"it is the staging that matters: steps in time, a twirl of parasols, gala gowns. It is more than a number. It serves as the show's signet, an essence of its experience, a key moment: a numbo. It is a ground zero of super showmanship."⁸

The numbo, as he colourfully describes it, has continued to recur in musical theatre ever since, even when authors began to become pre-eminent in the creative process. In CHICAGO, the numbo is 'Razzle Dazzle', staged as a kind of circus in which the sparkle and 'razzle dazzle' hide a multitude of sins. This distils the essence of the main story in which two convicted murderesses become overnight celebrities with a huge following. As the song asks of the public:

"How can they see with sequins in their eyes?"

Glamour supersedes morality! Unfortunately, there are as many bad examples of when glamour of the numbo has swayed musical dramatists away from the central dramatic purpose of the show. Probably the most extraordinary use of the numbo concept however, is the final Follies sequence in FOLLIES, in which there is a non-stop twenty minute sequence of four songs and a fifth which frames them, which lays bare the essential dilemma and personal re-evaluations of the four principal characters. This is the numbo at full stretch!

Interestingly, it is Bob Fosse, the noted Director/Choreographer who helps to shift emphasis away from the idea of form and structure towards the analysis of song types from a performer's viewpoint. In essence, he claims, there are only two kinds of song:

- i) The 'I am' song
- and ii) The 'I want' song.⁹

This may be useful as a breakdown in the actor's process, though it reduces all songs to a subjective level. Though this may be fundamentally true, since all good theatre songs reveal to the audience some aspect of the singer's character, the skill of the dramatist in the musical theatre is to do just that - reveal. He must disguise the 'I am' or 'I want' idea in the most appropriate way. Only the most naively drawn characters would sing directly in those terms.

David Craig is more helpful from this point of view in his book On Singing On Stage.¹⁰ He views the song as musical script, given sense through both the meaning of the lyric and the subtext to be discovered in the music. To that end he identifies four different song types:

- a) Subjective, frequently identified by the use of words such as 'I, me, we, etc.....
- b) Objective, using the word 'you'.
- c) Narrative, which tells a story.
- and: d) Instructive, which puts a particular viewpoint.

Obviously, such categories and identifications have implications for the singing actor as we shall see, but as a second set of qualifications of usage they lie well alongside Engel's types. Any of Craig's labels could be linked with any of Engel's and we would then have a precise identification of the kind of song and its conventional usage in dramatic terms.

Thus, we would describe 'Tonight' as a subjective rhythm ballad, or 'Gee, Officer Krupke' as an objective/narrative comedy song.

Such a system of labelling helps us to understand the conventional uses and prototypes of the musical theatre song, without ever suggesting that a musical must include any of these in order to be successful. To do so would be to suggest that the successful musical is the result of formula instead of conventional usage of form.

OTHER CONVENTIONS

Non-Vocal Musical Conventions.

In addition to the conventional use of song types, music contributes essentially to the expression of dramatic rhythm in non-vocal functions. Some of these conventions of musical form have been inherited from

earlier music-theatre alliances, others evolved due to practical expediency when confronted by staging techniques, still others created for the purpose of aiding musical memorability and sustaining the overriding spirit of the theatrical event.

Firstly, as already pointed out, music may be used as underscoring to a spoken scene. This convention is not unique to the musical theatre. Indeed, large sections of melodrama were conceived to be spoken to musical accompaniment. Certainly as a means of effecting a seamless transition from speech to song, underscoring has proved vital to the musical theatre and as such is an elemental convention of the form in its acknowledgement of the synthetic process.

From a staging point of view, underscoring has been used to cover scene changes, and effectively maintains dramatic momentum when the frequent clumsiness of stage technique would slow things down. In general, orchestral music for scene-changes has consisted of orchestral reprises of song material, which has the advantage of lodging musical themes in the memory of the audience, though this is a secondary consideration, the effect rather than the cause. Instrumental scene-change music is particularly related to the era when scenery was still predominantly composed of painted drops,

cutcloths, wings and borders with a few three dimensional units, which had to be manually moved into position. In order to cover the changing of drops and the manual change of three-dimensional units, the convention arose of scenes-in-one. These were conceived as short scenes, sometimes spoken, sometimes sung, often with no words at all, intended to be played in front of a single backdrop at the very front of the stage, while the scenery was changed behind it. A simple example of a scene-in-one is the penultimate scene in Act One of CAMELOT - a corridor in Camelot leading to the Great Hall. The set is being changed to the Great Hall itself for the investiture scene, and in order to give time for the change, Lerner and Loewe conceived a processional march to the ceremony, which contains some fine musical material, setting the exact mood for what is to follow and building up the audience's anticipation.

With the development of modern stage techniques, scenes-in-one became unnecessary, scenery being capable of being changed by automation in full view of the audience, a scenic convention which audiences quickly accepted. In producing any show which clearly has been conceived to include scenes-in-one, a modern director needs to evaluate whether the scene has any dramatic function in terms of action, words or music other than covering a scene change. If not, then a director would

be perfectly justified in excising the scene from the show altogether. However, the skilful musical dramatist will ensure that scenes-in-one are crucial to the dramatic line, even if born of theatrical expedience. The CAMELOT scene referred to has just such a function. Ultimately, the convention then is not one of changing scenery, but rather one of denoting change of locale or passage of time.

Yet perhaps the most lasting tradition of non-vocal music in the musical theatre is that of the Overture (and its cousins, the Entr'acte and the Playout). As a convention, it is not based upon absolute need, but its function is so effective that it has become universally accepted. It is, moreover, a convention whose association with the non-musical theatre relied upon its dramatic rather than musical basis. It is this dramatic function which allies it to drama rather than music, even though many composers have written overtures for the concert hall. With the exception of our present-day spoken plays, the theatrical experience has almost always been preceded by some form of musicalised 'curtain-raiser'. In the past its office was generally that of attracting attention to the fact that the play was about to begin and hence, emphasis was placed upon quieting the audience rather than relating to the work

which followed. However, as theatre audiences became more polite and with the introduction of the darkened auditorium, the attention of the audience was more easily focused and thus producers came to realise how effective the overture could be in the preparation of mood and atmosphere. For the musical theatre it became much more.

Opera historian Edward Dent writes:

"Whatever the character of the introduction, whether soft and mysterious, or noisy and frivolous, it has to tell us that we are going into a world of unreality, a world in which we are to forget the minor details of everyday life and surrender ourselves to the play of emotions which in everyday life we usually try to suppress or conceal, however deeply we may feel them."¹¹

Few of us have escaped that almost breathless moment when conductor and musicians hold time suspended in the raised baton - and when the baton is brought down, few of us have failed to respond to the sensory impact generated by the dimensions of sound. While, as Langer points out, this affective power may stimulate only our superficial impulses:

"to sing, tap, adjust one's step to musical rhythm, perhaps to stare, hold one's breath or take a tense attitude....."¹²

rather than reaching our emotions, which we know is the great dramatic potential of music, it nevertheless

causes us to begin the process of feeling through our theatrical art, an act for which most of us are grateful. So grateful, one librettist attests, that:

"let the orchestra strike up and the arcs glow with improbable colours, and we will accept..... bewitched by the magic of theatre."¹³

In its most recognisable form the Overture may be compared with the dramatic conventions of prologue. In a play, the ideas are introduced through direct speech, but in its musicalised counterpart, in a majority of examples, the overture introduces the work's melodic themes through a medley of selected tunes played by the orchestra. The reasons for selecting certain themes are predicated upon two factors.

Firstly, there is the sense of the musical dramatist as to which themes are most likely to be assimilated by the audience, but the second reason is rooted in reflecting the overall tone and style of the show. Of course, there is a demand for musical contrast, and sufficient complexity of melodic invention to sustain interest, so an overture is unlikely to contain themes of songs where the primary emphasis is the lyric as in comedy numbers. Equally, if there is to be a downbeat number included it is likely to be briefly stated. Due to this necessity for musical balance, the themes are often arranged in an order different from the

way they appear in the show itself. The total effect is one which creates a feeling in the audience, an expectation, an anticipation of what is to follow based upon the ideas and feelings suggested by the overture's themes.

In a similar way, the Entr'acte serves as a focusser for the succeeding act, reminding the audience of what has come before and setting up the expectation of development and resolve. The Playout music covers curtain calls and the exit of the audience, helping them to retain the essence of the theatrical experience after they have left the theatre building. In both cases, the length is shorter than the Overture.

While the Entr'acte and the Playout have remained purely musical, the Overture's alliance to dramatic prologue has led to another conventional use of the Overture in the musical theatre - that of the visual prologue. In 1961, CARNIVAL, utilising the medley overture, began with the curtain raised and a single figure emerging onto the stage. As he sits against the proscenium arch and begins to play an old concertina, so the musical overture begins, the orchestra creeping in. As it does, more figures begin to appear in ratio to the introduction of instruments. The music develops in a single extended crescendo to the point where the stage

is full of the characters of the circus, surging with life in a riot of colour and movement.

Four years earlier, WEST SIDE STORY had begun with a visual prologue, based upon the choreographic concept of Jerome Robbins depicting the tension between rival gangs. For this, Bernstein abandoned the medley overture and utilised a convention already discovered in the famous 'Carousel Waltz' from CAROUSEL, composing music specifically for this prologue. Here the balance between the aural and the visual interpretations of thematic material has shifted to emphasis upon the latter. The melodic line is so fragmented, that without the stage action from which it takes direction, a central theme would be difficult to perceive. The fragmented assembly of sounds - finger snaps, running footsteps, cries, grunts, snatches of street talk and the ultimate screams of the police whistle - play a part as essentially musical in its expression as that of the more traditional orchestral instrumentality. Furthermore, this opening prologue is not separated in time and space from the body of the show, but blends imperceptibly with its first song and the continuing action of the players on stage.

FOLLIES has a similar kind of prologue, using music from a song which was discarded from the sung score early in the creative process, but which perfectly suited the visual conception of ghostly Follies girls parading in an empty theatre. Likewise A CHORUS LINE has no overture as such but launches directly into an extended opening sequence which creates the rhythmic drive and relentless beat of the dancer's audition, as well as clearly showing the choreographic emphasis of the entire show. The function of the overture is here subsumed by the opening number.

Indeed, the approach to the staged visual overture has been rooted most frequently in the principles of choreography, and the final use of non-vocal music is in association with dance.

Unlike the other non-vocal musical conventions, that of dance music is rooted in the laws of dance. Admittedly, the tradition of using melodic and harmonic material from songs has been a constant practice in the musical theatre, but the fundamental principles of its use spring from the necessity for dance within the dramatic rhythm, music serving as emphatic accompaniment to the corporeal power that only dance can achieve. Frequently, the dance music for shows has been arranged by the orchestrator or an arranger hired specially for

dance music, hence the practice of providing variation on song material harnessed to the dance's particular stresses and moods. However, WEST SIDE STORY is significant in including music for dance that has been specifically composed as part of the overall shape of the score. In that respect shows from the last thirty years have discovered a new convention in the synthesising of dance music with the dramatic whole, such that a show like A CHORUS LINE, whose central expressive image is rooted in the world of dance is conceived as almost entirely dance music, even as the basis for song, (as in 'I Can Do That').

The Chorus

Dance, though it may be performed by a solo performer, is at its most effective when utilising more than one, and it reveals the musical theatre's predilection for choric expression. The moving body of the solo performer can sustain only a relatively low level of dynamics. But, John Martin points out:

"When two or more dancers are aware of each other, not merely as obstacles to free movements in that area that is available, but as the personification of emotional, dynamic tensions interoperating, the frame of the dance assumes an entity just as the frame of the drama does when actors set up emotional relationships between themselves."¹⁴

And, as the choral element is thus fundamental to the embodiment of the dance, it necessarily becomes a fact to the embodiment of any drama which incorporates it. By sheer virtue of the visible presence of a chorus in dance terms, they cannot help but be perceived as part of the concrete plurality of dramatic expression. Thus they become an embodiment of the dramatic experience while issuing from and serving a purely choreographic need.

Similarly, they spring to life as part of the acoustical need of the music, deriving a vocal life of their own from the need to reinforce or expand the size of sound in line with the dramatic moment. Admittedly, it is possible to utilise the vocal chorus as a non-physical presence, either concealed on stage, or, as in PROMISES, PROMISES, to place them in the pit with the orchestra, but most frequently they have been doubled with the dance chorus and thus become part of the drama proper.

Given such an unreal life, it is perhaps surprising that the use of the chorus does not completely pervert the integrity of the dramatic essence, but it does not. We must acknowledge the fact that the choric convention is as old as theatre history, yet we should not overlook the fact that it is also something of a dramatic

liability. The use of the chorus in drama is a perfect example of how a convention, discovered and perfectly realised in the form of Greek tragedy, can be either rediscovered in its functional use or else utilised out of habit, in which case it can very easily become the enemy of drama. It is particularly significant that the chorus has been retained by spoken drama most often in the form of a single performer, rarely taking on the form of the mass expression except in verse plays, whereas the musical theatre (and opera) have consistently drawn on the choric convention for the reasons explained above. The anachronism of choral mass in spoken drama has been particularly amplified by the move towards realism in the theatre, and its illusionistic needs, where the necessity for the chorus to speak directly to the audience immediately destroys any realistic illusion. Yet in those poetic dramas (verse plays and the plays of Expressionism), which used a massed chorus is revealed the manner in which it is possible to not only condition viewers to accept non-realistic effects by removing them from an everyday relationship with language, but also, more importantly, by intensifying the impact of the drama from the start, to heighten audience expectation. They reveal, in short, the modern means of recreating the essential need for which gave rise to the choric convention in the

first place - the need for lyricism. As H.D.F. Kitto points out in relation to Sophocles:

"The action comes to a climax, and on this climax the chorus enters, to carry it higher and higher with the eloquence of music and dance..... it does not merely contribute to the action of the play, it transforms it."¹⁵

Thus, in assessing the veracity of the choral statement we must look for the basic impulse of the moment; the necessity for that transformation described by Kitto and echoed in Kurt Weill's programme note to STREET SCENE:

"The singing takes over whenever the emotion of the spoken word reaches a point where the music can speak with greater effect."¹⁶

This principle of dramatic need will also aid in consideration of the magnitude of the choral reaction to the dynamics of the dramatic moment.

The tendency towards realism, even in a form as unreal as that of the musical theatre, led to a convention of viewing the chorus as a collective grouping of real individuals, each distinct from the other and having a realistically based place in the social and physical environment. However, the fundamental convention of the chorus is that of a single expressive entity with its own unique voice and place in the dramatic whole, equal in functional significance to that of any single character. Hal Prince, in his South

Bank Show Lecture, 'Rethinking The Musical',¹⁷ relates how he spent many years working in the inherited tradition of asking his chorus members to create realistic characters for themselves in order to rationalise their presence. Only with ZORBA did he begin to understand the significance of the chorus as a single voice, which he subsequently put to good effect in shows such as SWEENEY TODD. where the chorus both comments on the action and presents us with the myth in 'The Ballad Of Sweeney Todd', which becomes the thematic and structural means of formal unity, and the Chorus its theatrical embodiment.

Ultimately, the choric convention has other implications in terms of both the dramatic and theatrical setting.

Conventions Of Setting

From a purely technical point of view, the multiplicity of performers demanded by the choric convention requires more space than the non-musical play, not only in relation to pure numbers of personnel, but more specifically when called upon to become part of the directional movement of the show. The logistics of choreography present an obvious demand on spatial resources. The musical has frequently sought its

solution in the scaling down of its scenic element. Rather than the full-blown three-dimensional sets of the realistic non-spoken theatre, the musical has opted for a selective realism when realism is called for, merely suggesting setting or locale. Thus, the actual stage space is left open for the demands of choral numbers and choreographic drive. When realism has not been the emphasis, setting has been able to make use of scenic elements and lighting in an almost abstract fashion, close to Appia's vision.

So acclimatised have we become to suggestive realism in the musical theatre that either a completely abstract setting or a completely realistic one (such as that created by Oliver Smith for Higgins' drawing room in MY FAIR LADY) comes as something of a shock, in the latter case as somewhat burdensome and unnecessary.

In addition to the technical requirements of space, the extraneous nature of the chorus has contributed an additional element of conventionality to the aspect of locale for which we must be grateful. Due not least to the necessity of plausibility placed upon the drama by the application of 'the aesthetic of discovery' (credibility), the setting must be capable of including large numbers of people. Therefore the setting and also the theme must be more public; broader in scope and

inclusive of levels of energy and action not usually encountered in the non-musical theatre. WEST SIDE STORY is based firmly on the public sidewalks, subways and streets of New York, while MY FAIR LADY includes scenes at the racecourse and at the Embassy Ball not seen in the original play on which it is based. Of course, in order to create this plausibility, some musical dramatists have resorted to extremely fraudulent plots, simply to include the public setting. It must also be pointed out that the theatre itself (or variations of its manifestation) has been used so often for this place of publicness as to become a veritable convention in itself - the 'backstage' musical.

Nonetheless, the necessity for plausibility of setting is not an inviolable rule of the musical theatre, but a convention derived from the trend to realism. If one upholds the freewheeling logic of the emotional drive and dramatic line principle, one might go so far as to suggest that the musical theatre has restricted itself in its expressive possibilities by upholding the need for plausibility. Indeed, the use of all the conventions outlined above and the principles which lie behind their use are the frankest admissions of the musical theatre's unreality, from the first notes of the Overture to the dying strains of the Playout. In the use of song, dance, the chorus, and suggestionism of

setting, the musical declares itself at the service of heightened emotion, the exceptional, the ideal, the extraordinary, and ready to use any instrumentality at its command in its expression. In the means to the theatrical realisation of this instrumentality lies the necessity for convention.

The Orchestra

Perhaps the most unreal aspect of all the musical theatre's physical aspects is that of the orchestra, however large or small, which provides the musical accompaniment to the singers. That it is necessary in some form is implicit perhaps in the very term 'musical theatre'. Though it might be possible to create a musical which had no music other than the singing of the voices, to remove any musical accompaniment would be to remove one of the factors most able to respond to the rhythmic and tonal demands of the dramatic line, and probably explains why the first non-accompanied musical remains to be written.

Traditionally, we associate a very particular sound with the idea of a Broadway pit orchestra, but in truth what we hear in our minds is a particular style of sound, not one which is essential to the workings of musical theatre. There are plenty of examples of shows,

such as THE FANTASTICKS, which have been conceived to be accompanied by a small ensemble, and have even done away with the resources of choral voices. Consequently it must be made clear that the actual composition of the orchestra's instrumentality, (as well as the vocal complexity) answers the rhythmic impulse on an individual basis. It is a response predicated by the level to which a particular rhythmic drive demands to be taken. As Madsen puts it:

"To supply this demand by a single instrument or vocal line to a work of, say, WEST SIDE STORY's scope, would be tantamount to issuing a Volkswagen motor to a Rolls Royce."¹⁸

More disruptive to the dramatic experience is the visibility of the accompanying musicians. Frequently they reside in a gaping cavern between audience and stage, and remain throughout the show attired in formal dress and moving in response to the demands of playing an instrument. How can they fail to be disruptive to the world of make-believe above them? To producers anxious to achieve a total consistency of effect, their presence has been a continual source of embarrassment. From Wagner to HAIR, therefore, they have been pushed and shoved and jostled about in efforts to hide or disguise their theatrical extraneousness. Wagner himself had his pit at Bayreuth sunk so low that his orchestra was completely out of sight, the sound of his music emanating from this mystical cavern.

A CHORUS LINE hid the orchestra beneath the stage, while for MAN OF LA MANCHA the orchestra was split in two and housed in crate-like constructions, slatted to allow for visibility between actors and conductor, located where the theatre boxes would normally be. Concealing the orchestra completely from view eliminates the need to give them a credible visual existence in line with the production as a whole, but is dependent upon technical means for visual cueing between conductor and stage. An alternative method is to remove the players to the world of the stage itself, most frequently used in the show-within-a-show framework, though usually in addition to the pit musicians, as in CABARET. What it does effect however, is the feeling that the pit band are merely more sombre extensions of the instrumentality present in the make-believe world of the drama. The least evoked alternative is to remove the entire band to the stage as part of a self-conscious admission of theatrical unreality, particularly suitable to shows such as THE ROAR OF THE GREASEPAINT or CHICAGO, though in the case of the latter, the overall vaudeville motif gives reason enough for musicians in its self-reference. Similarly, BARNUM fashions a crypto-dramatic circus presentation which is able to include the circus band in the action and remove it to behind the action as if playing in a big top. One final alternative, and

only ever used in HAIR is one which depends upon the musical skills of the performers themselves in providing their own accompaniment. Partly because of its enormous contribution to the singularity of HAIR in its use of the actors as accompanists to themselves, one is scarcely conscious of a division between instrument and player, and thus almost wholly unconscious between what music is and what it is not. It seems to become a total extension of the actor's expressive voice.

Of course, appearance is not the primary factor involved in attempts to rationalise the presence of this non-dramatic body of players. As one might expect, sound is the greater prime mover.

The instrumentation of the accompanying ensemble again varies according to the demands of the dramatic impulse, yet there have been three major tendencies in orchestration in the brief history of the modern musical theatre. Firstly, an emphasis upon the strings and woodwind sounds of the reduced scale symphony orchestra; and secondly, a later development towards emphasis on the brass and reed sections, with the introduction of the jazz-rooted saxophone to the reeds. The shift to emphasis upon the latter has meant a shift in the balance between singers and orchestra, making it more difficult for singing tone to penetrate the wall of hard

sound provided by brass and reeds. If, of course, the singer cannot be heard, his words are lost and the meaning obscured. Thus the dramatic moment has slipped by and the audience have been distanced from the performance. By moving the orchestra to the stage where they are generally placed above or behind the actors, balance is somewhat correctable, though the physical shift is rarely made with a large pit band of say, twenty to thirty players. If the ensemble is small anyway, then the problems of balance have already been reduced.

One of the obvious, yet extremely problematic ways of correcting balance is through the technical means of amplification which is now virtually standard practice in major productions of musicals. Principal singers wear personal mics, which use radio transmitters to send their voices through the amplification system, and back-up microphones may be placed on the set or stage to pick up a more general acoustic sound. Such a system can rarely avoid the mechanical sounds and imbalances which result.

It is possible to isolate the orchestra, as in *A CHORUS LINE*, and amplify their sound too, passing all sound through a mixer, yet to do so is to undermine much of the acoustic resonance which contributes to the

thrill of musical theatre in particular, and of all live music in general. The Japanese tradition of Noh theatre has understood the significance of acoustic resonance in the theatre for hundreds of years. The Noh stage has large resonating jars beneath it, and when the performers want to effect greater emotional resonance, they are able to stamp on the stage over one of the jars setting up vibrations, virtually non-audible in the theatre space. Similarly, the vibrations from each instrument evoke response from the listener dependent upon their unique wave pattern of sound. When a full orchestra plays we have many different wave patterns setting up a full and vibrant resonance in the theatre. When all the sounds are mixed together through amplification, we have merely one set of resonances electronically produced. Thus to rely on amplification is to deny the musical theatre much of its unique quality and potential emotional resonance.

One fine example of good amplification usage was the original production of SUNDAY IN THE PARK WITH GEORGE, where only the singers were amplified, and so gently as to create the impression of pure acoustic sound. The careful placing of the speakers allowed the audience to visibly link the singing with the singer, avoiding the frequent sense of dislocation experienced

when shows are over-amplified. This dislocation is virtual death to the living essence of drama, for it appears as if the performers are miming and thus destroys any sense of spontaneity in the expression of character.

Not coincidentally, SUNDAY IN THE PARK serves as a good example of the third trend in instrumentation, for it uses a much smaller ensemble without ever losing breadth of tonality and size of sound when required. The finest modern theatre orchestrators such as Michael Starobin (SUNDAY IN THE PARK WITH GEORGE, MARCH OF THE FALSETTOS), and Jonathan Tunick (FOLLIES, SWEENEY TODD, INTO THE WOODS and most of the Sondheim shows), have begun to move away from the notion of the polyphonic sounds of the symphonically based orchestra towards a more chamber-orientated balance of instruments and musical lines. Interestingly, the balance has in many ways shifted towards keyboards and percussion. Certainly, strings tend to be used in much smaller numbers and the size of the brass and reed sections has been proportionately reduced (even though SWEENEY TODD uses three trombones). The percussion section on the other hand has grown proportionately larger, demonstrating these orchestrators' understanding of the significance of acoustic resonance. Moreover, they have begun to respond more directly to the dramatic

imperatives of each work, selecting the balance and composition of their ensembles to suit the tone and sound of the show, hence, SWEENEY TODD's three trombones and organ. Likewise, PACIFIC OVERTURES is scored to include several ethnic Japanese instruments. Tunick's training as a percussionist allowed him to invent a specific sound for Mrs Lovett's first entrance in SWEENEY TODD, where the score includes a tin bathtub!

More significantly still, their techniques of orchestration are based upon the understanding that the most important musical idea is in the vocal line and that the singers must be heard. Tunick's brilliant work on SWEENEY TODD only unleashes the full force of his twenty-eight piece orchestra to support the full chorus or between the sung lines, even in the full force of Sweeney's 'Epiphany'. Such an understanding of orchestration for the musical theatre is the one real hope against the prevalent reliance upon amplification.

The only other, and more idealistic hope is that there may develop a more ingenious approach to theatre architecture which will incorporate and advance upon all our current knowledge of space and acoustical design.

DISCOVERING CONVENTION

The creative process which results in a musical show demands that artists make decisions about the realisation of their ideas. We have already seen how crucial is the process of selection of expressive media, and the theatrical realisation of those media demands the use of convention in order that a clarity of communication can be achieved.

We have also seen how some of the discovered conventions of the past have become prototypal traditions, recognisable elements of musical theatre form. In the last thirty years such traditions and conventions have been skilfully utilised even as some shows and writers have rejected certain conventions and discovered new ones. Even a brief glance at the conventions and traditions outlined above will show that for all the examples we might give of any particular convention there are always exceptions which seem to go against them and the seemingly firm principles of creation they suggest. What is crucial to realise is that there are no hard and fast rules. Even the fundamental principles of lyric and music united in song can be flouted, but what is often misunderstood is that almost all influential innovation in the musical theatre has been the result of the knowledge of such traditions

and conventions. These conventions have been rejected due to the demands of the rhythmic entity embodied in the Book. Just as the selection of expressive media is rooted in the rhythmic impulse, so is the shaping of convention. Yet the ultimate choices about conventional usage will be linked to the question of style and theatrical emphasis.

Stylistically, many of the conventional uses of chorus, orchestra, song and so on which we identify with the musical theatre are rooted in the theatrical style of realism, and here is the distinction between essential convention and prototypal tradition. The essential conventions of song, dance, chorus, accompaniment - the total instrumentality of theatrical performance - become traditions only through repeated usage in response to stylistic concepts of the theatrical experience. Thus, it is all too easy for traditional uses of convention to be employed inappropriately; employed without thought or response to the rhythmic and stylistic demands of the dramatic idea.

Convention must be rediscovered every time idea becomes physical form in the theatre. When this is realised in relation to the demands of the Book, a new unity is achieved, embodying consistency of thought and style.

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CHAPTER 5

A QUESTION OF STYLE

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Accepting that convention is essential to the theatrical manifestation of the musical theatre, its form is affected by the factor we term 'style'. As we have seen, certain conventional uses of the media of the musical have been fashioned into prototypal traditions based upon conceptions of dramatic illusion, that is a particular style of theatre. But, what do we mean by 'style'? It is an elusive term. Most of us will understand what style means to us individually, yet to pin it down in relation to musical theatre is no easy task, rooted as it is in the whole concept of synthesis. A dictionary definition refers to style in the arts as:

"A mode of expression of performance peculiar to an individual, group, time or place."¹

As this relates to the musical theatre, the overall 'mode of expression' will affect each of the contributing media and the way in which they are fashioned as part of the dramatic whole.

In the purest sense, style emerges from the creative process as part of the organic quality we have identified in all works of art. As Aaron Frankel puts it, in the musical theatre:

"The seed anticipates style."²

and everything starts from the seed or Book. The shaping of the story (in its broadest sense) and the expression of its spirit, both concentrates and amplifies the seed, while the choices made regarding the sound and look of the show begin to embody it. Thus, he explains:

"Style arrives in every way that these are allowed to work as tools of the musical dramatist."³

Yet if the seed is able to 'anticipate' style, then surely that suggests a preconceived notion of a style which is contained in the Book. Certainly, some shows have been inspired by purely stylistic considerations, though more usually the theme of the piece and the stylistic concept are born together, the earliest step in the process of synthesis.

As with the traditions of conventional use identified, so certain trends of expressive mode have come to be identified with specific concepts of theatrical style. Nevertheless, Frankel insists that if style is allowed to grow from the seed of the show, a unique reality is created, one in which:

"Content (is) perfectly expressed."⁴

One of the most frequent words used in association with the idea of theatrical style is 'tone', a word fortuitously rooted in the concept of aural perception and hence suited to the musical theatre. The overall style of the show will affect the tone of the music, certainly, as it will be expressed in all aspects of the show's theatrical life, including the discovery and use of conventions. Frankel's work suggests a process by which the style might be allowed to grow organically from the seed. His book, Writing the Broadway Musical, might suggest by its title that the musical is open to formula, but of course it is not, and he wisely presents a possible process by which musical dramatists might convert their ideas to theatrical form, based on the principles and essential conventions outlined in Chapter Four. Most significantly, he centres his work upon the sound and look of the show, the modes of perception through which the audience will most readily identify style, though style will affect form and structure equally with the sound and look. It is of course, no coincidence that the sound and look take pre-eminence in Frankel's work, aware as he always is that the key to the dramatic experience is the vital role of the audience:

"Successful shows have parts for the audience; failures do not."⁵

In the use of conventions, as we have seen, this idea is reflected in the emphasis upon converting necessities of living theatrical form into dramatic function.

Thus, conventions are fashioned in line with the developing style. When style is suited to the Book, we accept the conventions without question; when style is imposed upon the Book, the conventional devices seem banal or inappropriate, utilised out of habit. Stylistically, this leads us to the idea of the cliché. Dramatic clichés are born of over-use of character types or interactions and situations, and when aiming for direct simplicity of expression, undermine the integrity of the work.

Nevertheless, cliché may be used to effect through its acknowledged application in the forms of parody and pastiche. These two terms are often mistakenly used as synonymous. Parody uses cliché as criticism and is in effect a form of satire; pastiche, on the other hand, uses cliché as part of self-satire, displaying the ability of the form to laugh at itself, but always in an affectionate way. THE GREAT AMERICAN BACKSTAGE MUSICAL by Solly and Ward is a fine example of pastiche, using a style reflective of the 'backstage' musical films of the thirties and forties, which affects the tone of the story-telling, but which also allows us to be affected

by the story as if it were new, even when it utilises familiar modes of convention and style. Pastiche is a much used stylistic ally of the musical theatre, where parody is not, better suited to spoken comedy or to the briefer moments of revue. Where pastiche can have a place in the sustained development of dramatic idea, parody is far more difficult to sustain over a whole show and is better suited to individual moments or songs.

Nor is it coincidence that pastiche is a stylistic concept better suited to the impressionism of music, for it does not undermine the basic directness of affection of feeling, where parody in musical terms negates the musical effect without being able to substitute any other means of affecting the listener. In that sense pastiche rediscovers the effective use of convention.

Perhaps the finest use of pastiche is in Stephen Sondheim's score for FOLLIES, where both lyrically and musically he reflects the style of earlier songwriters in a whole range of songs conjuring up the sense of earlier Follies ('Beautiful Girls', 'One More Kiss', 'Losing My Mind', 'Buddy's Blues', 'I'm Still Here', and more).

Pastiche, like all stylistic considerations will inevitably affect the sound of the music. Musical tone

and colour are crucial variables in the stylistic consideration of the show, and can be powerfully used in the creation of locale or mood. We have already seen how this can grow from the choices of orchestration, and it demonstrates the 'chicken-and-the-egg' nature of the link between style and convention. Style may influence the shaping of formal convention, just as the shaping of conventions will produce a stylistic effect.

Most specifically, this interaction of form and style will have bearing upon the total shape of the musico-dramatic structure. There exists a body of principles regarding the layout of the score - the total musical programming - which are not dissimilar to those for layout of the individual song. This body of principles is based upon the necessity for expression of dramatic idea and the stylistic demands inherent in the Book. It balances the number of particular song types, the emphasis upon particular characters, the size of musical forces, the shifting locales of setting, the demand for variations of pace, volume, tone and colour. Any analysis of a musical theatre score will present an example of this, even though every show will have a different layout and be different in style, according to the seed in the Book.

Engel recognises the necessity for careful layout of the score and analyses MY FAIR LADY as follows:

Act One

1. Background Music (Bustle) under prime.
2. Comedic Musical Scene (Male, Female & 2nd Male).
3. Charm Song and Dance (F & M Chorus).
4. Rhythmic Comedy Song (M Comic & 2 minor M).
5. Comedic Musical Scene (M).
6. Reprise of 4 (M Comic & Full Chorus).
7. Comedic Charm Scene (F).
8. Comedic Musical Scene (M & F and 2nd M and Chorus).
9. Charm Song and Dance (F & M and 2nd M).
10. Gay Ballad (F & 2nd Fs).
11. Charm Song and Dance (Chorus).
12. Coda to 11.
13. Ballad and Scene (2nd M and 2nd F).
14. Underscoring based on 10.
15. Procession and Waltz as introduction (in one).
16. Procession and Waltz proper.

Act Two

17. Charm Can-Can and Soft Shoe (Musical Scene).
18. Reprise of 7 (F into M and 2nd M and Chorus).
19. Reprise of 13 (2nd M and F) into.....
20. Dramatic Musical Scene (F and 2nd M).
21. Charm Song and Dance (Reprise of 3), (F & M Chorus).
22. Charm Song and Dance (2nd M and Chorus).
23. Comedic Musical Scene (M and 2nd M).
24. Charm Scene and Ballad (F and M).
25. Charm Dramatic Soliloquy and End (M).

This is reasonably comprehensive by itself, but when we put it alongside the dramatic line we can see how clearly its rhythmic balances and contrasts are shaped according to the plot. Note also how Eliza's character (F) has a preponderance of Charm Songs while

Higgins (M) has more comedic biased material in line with his chauvinistic wit. In line with overall tone and style of its source material (Shaw's PYGMALION) there are few ballads. A glance at the layout of WEST SIDE STORY would reveal a wealth of ballad material, much more in keeping with Tony and Maria's direct sincerity and passion. Nevertheless, there is in common a need for musical contrast in the programming of a show which all successful shows acknowledge in their service of dramatic rhythm. Such principles are rooted in the conventions of song yet are theatrically fashioned according to the stylistic development of the work. In such a way style and the use of convention are inextricably linked.

So musical style is harnessed to the musical theatre through the convention of song. In its composition, orchestration, lyric and melody, and placing in the musical programme, each song becomes an embodiment of style as appropriate to each show.

Yet there is another aspect of style that colours the creation of a musical; that of the individual style of the artist. Just as any artist develops his own expressive voice in response to the cultural demands of his temporal and physical environment, so all artists in the musical theatre have distinctive voices. This

aspect of style is more difficult to define. In learning about the crafts of creation in the musical theatre, many artists begin with imitation of successful artists, not as flattery but as a way of learning what is best about the form in which they work. Only with the basis of such fundamental craft is it then possible to develop and express an individual style - what might be referred to as 'finding one's own voice'. In that respect, artists do not consciously aim to discover their own style, yet each does, coloured by a personal response to the world in which they exist. Style, viewed in this way, is determined by identifiable qualities of expression perceived in the work of the artist. So we are able to talk of lyrics which are 'Sondheimesque' due to a tendency on the part of Sondheim to combine images of joy and despair in close proximity such as 'a perfect little death' from A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC or 'unbearable bliss' from INTO THE WOODS. Likewise, Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical style is noted for its lyrical romanticism, Puccini-like in style, identifiable in the big ballads such as 'Memory' from CATS or 'Don't Cry For Me Argentina' from EVITA, while PHANTOM OF THE OPERA is particularly suited as a subject to his musical romanticism, the whole score being coloured by that fact. As noted in Chapter One, a particular stylistic voice is of no use in defining

musical theatre, yet as Webster's dictionary points out, style is :

"A quality that gives distinctive excellence to something and that consists especially in the appropriateness and choiceness of the elements combined....."

The appropriateness of selection is the first way in which we may assess the artistic merit of a particular show, and as such, the perceived style is vital to our qualitative judgements, both in terms of the individual style of the artists involved and of style as suited to the inner life of the drama, the aural and visual colouration of theatrical presentation.

I have focused most specifically here upon the idea of style in relation to music and song, yet clearly it works in relation to all the media employed - hence, the rightness of the taut street-language and explosive exclamations of the gangs in WEST SIDE STORY, the elegance of Cecil Beaton's costumes for MY FAIR LADY and the Chagall-like set designs of FIDDLER ON THE ROOF, based on the single image of the circle as expressive of the Jewish stadt.

Yet ultimately, due to the emphasis on synthesis in the musical theatre and in keeping with its primary emphasis upon drama, it is stylistic conceptions of the

drama in relation to its theatrical life which fundamentally govern the use of convention and subsequent style in the musical.

Dramatic Style

In the use of its conventions, as they make manifest both the dramatic form and the theatrical life of the musical, the form gives us the frankest admission of its unreality. This fact affects the choice of subject or theme, the shaping of musico-dramatic structure, and the revelation and development of character, in a way that is most crucial to the interpretative process and the central singing actor. Yet the stylistic development of the musical's expression is subject to harnessing of convention to dramatic conceptions of style which exist in relation to the two aesthetic polarities identified in our model for analysis. In Chapter Four we saw how certain traditional uses of convention have been developed in response to the concept of 'realism', and this is just one of the terms applied to specific dramatic styles most easily remembered as the 'Isms' family.

In line with the two polarities, the 'Isms' family divides itself into two groups:

Firstly, in line with the aesthetic of discovery comes the styles we refer to as:

realism or naturalism

impressionism

representationalism

and all those styles which are rooted in the idea of theatre as illusion based upon a representation of life as we experience it in everyday physical terms. Such a conception of theatrical style places its emphasis upon drawing the audience into the created world of the drama, attempting to give the illusion of a life-like reality, and thus negating the actual reality of the awareness of the theatrical experience;

Secondly, in an attempt to capitalise on the awareness of the theatrical experience, and in line with the aesthetic of opulence come the styles labelled as:

anti-realism or anti-illusionism

expressionism

presentationalism

which attempt to distil the essences of human experience by presenting them through a self-consciously theatrical mode, making full use of the range of expressive voices and of the contractual

bond entered into by both performer and audience upon entering the theatre-space to share in the creation of the theatrical experience.

Given that the second group is conscious of the full range of expressive media which the theatre, magpie-like as ever, can all upon in its presentation, and also stresses the nature of the bond between performer and audience, it would seem to be the obvious style of the musical theatre. Certainly Kislan refers to all musical theatre as 'presentational'⁷ in its essential use of song. Perhaps it is surprising then that so many of the prototypal traditions of the musical have been those related to the concepts of the first grouping, that of illusion. But, we should not really be surprised, for, as pointed out in discussing the two polarities, neither exists by itself, and successful expression rests upon the need for the balance of the two. Given that the essential conventions are presentational in their nature, it is therefore no surprise that the musical has sought to balance this emphasis by a stylistic emphasis which seeks to harness the potentially non-dramatic qualities of music and dance to the inner life of the drama.

Nonetheless, in the last thirty years there has been a significant re-addressing of the inherent

presentational qualities of the musical, for many reasons which will be touched upon later, but which has sought to mine the rich vein of obvious theatricalism in the musical theatre for its own potential instead of trying to disguise it in a veneer of life-like rationality. As Langer pointed out, such rationality is not essential to the life of the drama,⁸ and in its musical form, the drama achieves its own free-wheeling dynamic and logic from the central rhythmic line of the Book.

From this free-wheeling logic, from the acknowledgement of its own theatricality comes the facility for the musical for employing conventions mostly disregarded by the non-musical theatre based upon realism; those of the Chorus and the Soliloquy.

I have already outlined the implications of the choric convention for the musical theatre. In a similar way, the use of soliloquy allows for direct expression of inner thoughts, amplifying the emotional responses of the character through song. Centred on the self, it is little wonder that Bob Fosse sees the major aspects of song form as being those of either the 'I am' or 'I want' variety. Certainly, the solo song is a useful means of character revelation, especially when the character expresses a personal response to the dramatic

situation. The danger of course, is, that the musical dramatist will use the sung soliloquy to tell the audience things about the character which the character could not possibly be aware of himself. Nevertheless, the convention of soliloquy shares an inherent similarity to that of the natural urge to sing, that of a need to give outward expression to inner thoughts and feelings, and is crucial to the craft of the musical dramatist, most essentially in its ability to heighten both emotional expression and response. Above all, soliloquy lends itself to the lyricism of the poetic theatre.

In its use of different concepts of style, the musical theatre is as open to variation as the non-musical theatre. The specific conventions of the musical, predicated by the employment of music and dance as essential media, only present certain fundamental conditions relating to the mode of theatrical performance. What they do not do, is to restrict the breadth of development of dramatic form in relation to genre. Just as the poetic non-musical theatre may be formed as tragedy, comedy, comedy of manners, melodrama, farce and so on, so the musical should be capable of such a breadth of variation.

Of course, we have seen how the very roots of synthesis in the musical theatre, based as they are upon the inherent qualities of the media employed, make the musical particularly suited to certain kinds of ideas, themes, subjects and treatments - those with an inherent musicality - yet for all artists, the question of generic variation is as vital as that of essential convention in the understanding of the creation of a work of art, and the musical is no exception.

Genre In The Musical Theatre

As soon as one begins to tackle the question of genre, one moves away from the question of style. Admittedly, particular genre are associated with particular stylistic emphases. In the non-musical theatre, farce, for example, is associated with a broader knockabout style of acting than say, for a Chekov play. Yet, at heart, genre is not style. This is reflected in the fact that there is no such style as 'farce', but rather a style associated with it which is 'farcical'. What then, is the standard by which we might identify a particular genre?

In one sense, the musical is a genre of theatre, in that it is possible to identify in it the 'primary illusion' of all theatre - hence the title of Chapter One - In Search Of A Genre. That view is central to

this study. It may be identified as a specific genre due to specific features of expression which it consistently displays; that is, those features and conventions which are essential due to the employment of music and dance.

As Kendall L. Walton explains in his essay 'Categories Of Art',⁹ a category or genre is something that is:

"perceptually distinguishable if membership in it is determined solely by features of works that can be perceived in them when they are experienced in a normal manner."¹⁰

In essence then, a genre is identified by certain features or properties and we have already looked at those features which make the musical a distinguishable genre of all theatre. In the theatre, experience in a 'normal' manner must relate to the essential union of content, actor and audience, but also relates to the Artist's intention; in other words, how the work is intended to be presented and received according to the Artist's initial conception as embodied in the Book. Once again the Book is central, and demonstrates the clear link between musical theatre creation and an understanding of its generic place in the theatrical spectrum.

In addition however, it is also possible to recognise certain features in musicals which allow for categorisation into sub-genres in line with many of the generic categories of non-musical theatre. Paul Hustoles takes just such an approach in his admirable dissertation 'Musical Theatre Directing: A Generic Approach'.¹¹

In common with non-musical theatre genres, the musical's sub-genres share many of the emphases and recognisable features of each category, which are based upon particular uses of convention or stylistic considerations. Yet Hustoles goes much further and examines musical theatre works in relation to their identifiable uses of song and dance as well as more traditional theatrical considerations. As such, his work is unique in its thoroughness and is highly recommended to all prospective artists and critics in the field of musical theatre. It is no coincidence either, that his work is rooted in a directorial approach, for we have already seen how the understanding of genre affects style through the central performer. The great danger of course in a generic approach is that, for the creative artist, a category or genre may prove restricting and lead to an imposed style, rather than the more preferable organic development of style, yet for the interpretative artist, it is a vital and

useful signpost, not least because very few works of art fall clearly into one critical category or the other. Yet, ever mindful that a perceptible category or genre is in effect an invented critical concept, we can view all musicals as belonging to one sub-genre or another.

Hustoles examines shows with regard to their features (as intended to be perceived) by referring to these features in one of three ways - standard, variable or contra-standard, according to definitions outlined by Walton:

"A feature of a work of art is standard with respect to a category if its omission would disqualify, or tend to disqualify, a work from that category.

A feature is variable with respect to a category if the possession or lack of it is irrelevant to whether a work belongs to that category.

A feature is contra-standard if its presence tends to disqualify the work from a category."¹²

Walton, too, points out the dangers:

"Needless to say, it will not be clear in all cases..... since the criteria for classifying works of art are far from precise."¹³

Nevertheless, Hustoles, by examining aspects of several well-known shows from the musical theatre, is able to perceive seven separate distinguishable categories.

In addition, he identifies three broader categories into which the seven sub-genres fall.¹⁴

Musical Comedy

which contains:	Musical Comedy
	Musical Farce
and;	Musical Comedy Of Manners

Musical Drama

which contains:	Musical Drama
	Musical Melodrama
and;	Musical Romance

and Musical Revue (no sub-categories).

Rather than repeat his work in full here, APPENDIX A gives a full breakdown of the specific features (standard and variable) by which he identifies categories. What is important to note is that in each category he includes highly successful shows of the modern musical theatre.

His work in identifying these categories and their standard features is based on examination of three shows in each category which are listed with the features of each category, together with other examples drawn from the period of this study. Although it is possible to

take issue with the inclusion of certain shows in one category or another, his work is by far the most comprehensive generic analysis of the musical theatre to date and has proved not a little beneficial to this author's creative work in the field.

Of course, many shows seem to fall readily into more than one category, and again the dangers of a 'formula' approach to the form are to be resisted, but as tendencies of conventional use allied to concepts of dramatic style his work is a rich vein to be mined by artists and critics alike.

The Musical As Comedy

It is particularly interesting to note his two major divisions of Musical Comedy and Musical Drama, as distinct from the non-musical concepts more usually found of Comedy and Tragedy. (Although in our search for a definition of the musical theatre we discounted the forms associated with revue, Hustoles is correct in his recognition of a certain form of musical theatre which has close links with revue).

The non-inclusion of the term Tragedy in Hustole's categories is of significance in that it reflects the musical's tendency to deal with certain themes suited to its musicality. This is echoed in the peculiar

attitude, noted in Chapter One, of those who still insist, as Northrop Frye puts it, on seeing the musical as a lower form, where:

"Literature is divided between a 'high' form of epic and tragedy and a 'low' form confined to comedy."¹⁵

Yet, if we disregard the concepts of 'high' and 'low' art, we might begin to see that all musical theatre could be classified as Comedy.

James Blackburn Graves attempts a definition of the musical theatre in a dissertation entitled 'A Theory Of Musical Comedy Based Upon The Concepts Of Susanne K. Langer'.¹⁶ in which he outlines the essential difference between Comedy and Tragedy.

Given that all drama relates to a personal sense of life or 'self-realisation',¹⁷ Comedy, he asserts reflects the impulse of the human organism for survival:

"to survive, despite imbalances..... to seize the opportunity for life."

Tragedy on the other hand, reflects the human awareness of mortality:

"the beginning, efflorescence and end of life."¹⁹

Interestingly, this reflects the concepts of Fortune (in the case of Comedy) and Fate (in the case of

Tragedy). If, as Langer proposes, drama suggests a:

"virtual future in the guise of Destiny."²⁰

then Fate and Fortune are the masks that Destiny adopts in relation to the respective concerns of Tragedy and Comedy.

Graves suggests that in Comedy:

"we seek to maintain the pattern of vitality in a non-living universe."²¹

while for Langer, Comedy is equal to the rhythm of biological existence, a pattern shared by all living things:

"the strain of maintaining a vital balance amid the alien and impartial chances of the world."²²

When universal disruption occurs for the organism, it struggles to restore order or adapts to survive, usually by seizing opportunity.

Such a description of the 'organism' might well be a description of the comic protagonist in any comedy of world drama. In Comedy, the real antagonist is the world, where in Tragedy the real antagonist is the protagonist's own awareness of his separateness from the world in which he exists.

This view of Comedy takes us light years away from the popular notion of Comedy as humour, though it certainly can be humorous. The sense of Comedy as the instinct for survival is what allows us to endure in the face of cruel world gone mad, and we can laugh at the horror. Such a sense is one of the absurd, and we shall see how the musical has just begun to be awakened to the possibilities of absurdity in its range of expression. What is crucial in Comedy is the ability to recover, to stay vital even in the face of a less than perfect situation. The central characters of Comedy may falter, but they will never fail. They are the ultimate survivors.

No wonder then that the musical exists in the world of comedy. Obeying as it does the need for song as vital human expression, it reflects that human instinct where song and dance are means of releasing emotion which, left unexpressed, would threaten the stability of the human organism. In opera, where there is no sublimation to the necessity for song, but where sung expression is merely part of the battery of musical technique, then Tragedy may be allied to it.

In such a way, musical theatre is all Comedy, though, due to its generalised use to mean humour, it would be confusing to call musical theatre Musical

Comedy. Hustoles recognises this and his broad group of Musical Comedy refers to those sub-genres which focus upon humour, where his Musical Drama is in effect Musical Serious Comedy in line with the definition of Comedy above. What he recognises is the fact that Comedy is the home of humour, but it is not the same.

In the musical there are countless examples of where the comedic protagonists are either winners (OLIVER, A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC, HELLO DOLLY) or survivors (THE FANTASTICKS, FOLLIES).

In addition to this concept of Comedy, Langer notes three key terms which relate to it - that all Comedy is:

"contingent, episodic and ethnic."²³

All musical theatre characters have lives that are open, fortuitous, 'contingent' in Langer's sense, like Dolly Levi in HELLO DOLLY or Rusty in STARLIGHT EXPRESS. Whatever the situation, however disastrous things seem, recovery is a possibility, for these characters have a belief in futures that are full, a belief in self-power. (Perhaps that is particularly reflective of the American belief in self-power, and in that sense one might be justified in calling the real spirit of the modern musical theatre American). Certainly, it leads to a sense of the musical having a fundamentally celebratory nature. As Graves puts it:

"The musical employs these occasions of celebration to show human vitality, but also to demonstrate the possibilities of the future, as signals pointing the way out of the morass of the world. One lives in uncertainty, but as these celebratory events demonstrate, one lives."²⁴

It is interesting to note here how in WEST SIDE STORY, adapted from a Shakespeare tragedy, the end of the story is changed so that Maria (Juliet) does not die, but in a final ritual of bearing away Tony's (Romeo's) body, the two warring gangs are united, suggesting the possibility of a world of harmony, which has been prefigured by Tony and Maria's vision in 'Somewhere'. This final ritual could hardly be called celebratory, yet in a sense it is, because we have seen the perfection of the possibility of peace in the lover's vision. Humanity will survive. In that sense it is contingent and in line with both Kislán's²⁵ and Lerner's²⁶ arguments that the musical theatre is:

"a moral theatre."

We have already seen how the musical is formally episodic due to the nature of its shifting from one expressive mode to another, yet it is also inherently so, and the importance of song should not go underestimated here. As pointed out, the impulse for song is as a way out of trouble. Song and dance resolve upsets and restore balance. Graves goes so far as to

suggest that there exists a virtual category of recovery songs.²⁷ A prime example is 'There's Gotta Be Something Better Than This' from SWEET CHARITY, whose music has a rhythmic drive that suggests the determination of Charity and her friends to "get up, get out, and live." Given that song has its own strict structural demands, it follows that the musical must echo its episodic form. Yet in Comedy, what is interesting is the suggestion of George Kaufmann that comic structure is rooted in a single basic principle:

"Get your characters up a tree in Act One, throw stones at them in Act Two, and get them down in Act Three."²⁸

Although the musical has most often been shaped in Two Acts, the fundamental episodic nature of the 'stone-throwing' concept is clear, and in that sense is true of musical theatre.

In its third aspect of ethnicity, the musical lies in the direct line of all comedy, especially when ethnicity refers to the drawing of character. Ethnic characters are interlinked with their world and dependent on it, where tragic characters have an individuality that sets them apart from their world. As Graves describes it, an ethnic character is:

"Typically a representative of, and closely allied to, a more or less homogeneous group."²⁹

Virtually all musical theatre characters are ethnic in that sense.

We have seen how the concept of ethnicity affects the tonal and stylistic development of a show. In a similar way it affects the choice of subject or theme to be treated by the musical as paeon to a specific group or set of values. FIDDLER ON THE ROOF or MILK AND HONEY are paeans to Jewish culture and identity, while the same could be said of LA CAGE AUX FOLLES in respect of Gay life-styles. The Black culture has also been celebrated in shows such as PURLIE or EUBIE!, while DREAMGIRLS pays tribute to the Afro-Caribbean influence on the world of popular music.

Even where a show is not conceived as a paeon, the ethnicity of character and setting and its subsequent effect upon the style of theatrical expression will inevitably depict a cultural spirit. ZORBA clearly reflects Greek culture, while THE KING AND I is just the most well known example of shows suggesting the spirit of the Orient. There are countless examples, for in effect every show is subject to the concept of ethnicity in its style.

Given that this is so, it seems only suitable that so many of the expressive forms utilised by the musical

and their stylistic shaping should be rooted in popular culture, hence a tendency on the part of some critics to refer to the 'folk' aspect of the musical theatre.

The danger of course, is that in identifying the ethnic spirit of a show, we might lose sight of the fact that the form is not quintessentially rooted in that mode of cultural expression. In that sense, most of the commentators who refer to the 'American' or 'Broadway' musical are really referring to the fact that a large proportion of musicals written in the U.S. in the last fifty years have been set in American or even Broadway locations and as such have naturally reflected its cultural spirit in the ethnicity of expressive voice, giving them an identifiable Broadway 'feel'. But, to suggest that the musical is a true one only if it has that Broadway feel is to turn the potential of the musical in on itself, and deny it its full value in giving voice to all cultures and all ideals.

In that it may do so lies Graves' suggestion that all musical theatre is contingent, episodic and ethnic and that therefore it must be considered as Comedy (whether predominantly humorous or serious in tone).

Theatricalism As Style

The work of Graves and Hustoles in particular has serious implications for the director in musical theatre. Not only must he be able to grasp the usual theatrical concepts of genre and style, he must also be aware of the basic conventions and modes of expression predicated by the use of song and dance with all the succeeding implications relating to form and style; in short, the very essence of synthesis. In particular he must understand the technical workings of musico-dramatic structures, the principles of the singing actors in rehearsal, the basis of choreographic patterns and the idea of a rhythmic entity, in addition to all the usual dramatic imperatives of the theatrical art. Hustoles is at great pains in his introduction to point out the fundamentally different craft of the musical theatre director from that of his non-musical counterpart or of the director of opera. Given that many directors from both these fields have also directed musicals, and not a few with conspicuous lack of success, it is a view which this study cannot re-emphasise enough. Hustoles writes:

"theatre history and dramatic criticism have long provided the director with insight and guidance in the directing of plays. Musical theatre analysis has been extremely scarce and does not answer the specific needs of the director. It is erroneous for the director to underestimate the difference between the musical and the regular drama, and yet many directors feel that the task is equal."³⁰

Most essentially, the task of the musical theatre director is to grasp the basic theatricalism of the form. That is, the basic presentational potential of the musical which can allow for Dolly Levi's entrance down a staircase at the Harmonia Gardens Restaurant in HELLO DOLLY!, making it into a rising crescendo of theatrical thrill lasting almost ten minutes! In the non-musical source, such an entrance would take perhaps ten seconds. In that way the musical theatre is inherently more theatricalist by nature than its non-musical counterpart. This theatricalism rests upon the very nature of 'truthful' expression in the musical theatre form.

Given that the media used and the conventions of their theatrical employment might suggest a mere mish-mash of unrelated effects, how is it that such deviations from the fundamental art of acting, their dissimilar characteristics and the subsequent audience response they evoke, can be reconciled to a comprehensible state of co-existence for the duration of a single dramatic experience? It is of course, the candour of theatricalism itself, in which, to quote Gassner:

"the object of action and of all other 'imitative' elements is not imitation but creativity..... the theatricalist maintains that there is never any sense in pretending that one is not in the theatre; that no amount of make-believe is reality itself; that in short, theatre is the medium of dramatic art, and effectiveness in art consists in using the medium rather than concealing it."³¹

It is style then which resolves sense out of chaos, and the overriding style is that of theatricalism, a style which recognises more than any other the gamelike nature of theatre. The musical's seemingly massive body of 'rules of the game' relating to the differing expressive media and their conventional usage ironically allows a far greater sense of play; an audaciousness which welcomes the sudden, the astonishing, the extravagant.

In this milieu of freedom, however, the factor of control, over which style is also the master, is far more difficult to wield than it is, say in the case of realism, where life itself is the ever-present source of artistic balances and checks. Its licence would seem to extend only to the effectiveness of the effects themselves; indeed has done so in instances where a musical has been condemned for being form without content. Aesthetic pleasure, however, like the game, cannot subsist on fun alone. There must be an end point to be won for the playing to be worth the effort. Theatricalism when made a fully understood part of the

director's vocabulary does more than govern shape or balance effects. As Madsen writes:

"In the basic honesty of theatricalism's nature it can, for example, expose the pretentiousness inherent in a musical's drifting too close to naturalism and the foolishness of its subsequent attempts to pass off its effects of synthesis as facts. It can deal equally unkindly with a make-believe world gone too far afield in fantasy, romance or sentimentality. It encourages colour and light, spectacle and surprise, but reveals too the tawdriness of paint and shadows, glare and trickery when they stand in their stead."³²

Thus, theatricalism extends to the musical the entire vocabulary of the theatre's tools through which to speak, yet at the same time insures the operation of control and comprehension by being governed itself by an essential unity of expression. Stark Young wrote:

"the essence of style in art is that no form can be quite predicted before it comes into being, and that there is no form that is right when separated from the one content that it alone expresses and none better or worse save with regard to the soul that is to be expressed."³³

The style of theatricalism then, is not a device to excuse a policy of 'anything goes', but is rather a pervasive and cohesive core of centrality through which the union of literalness and abstraction (the aesthetic polarities of credibility and display) as well as all the intermediate shifting levels of expression which result from their conjunction, can be made not only

believable as part of the theatrical experience but also necessary. The musical's conventional style of theatricalism amplifies and extends the size of the aesthetic experience while remaining consistent to the expectations it arouses.

Whenever in its history the musical theatre has attained a level of enrichment, it has done so by being faithful in all its parts to the consistency of its rhythmic dynamism and the style which it dictates. Thus, in its selection of media, its discovery of convention, its balance of aesthetics, its development of style and its fundamental synthesis, the musical lives as testament to the theatrical impulse. This, as Coleridge said of all art:

"constitutes its genius - the power of acting creatively under laws of its own origination."³⁴

The musical achieves this when it creates Gottfried's 'kick in the pants' and we shall see just how shows of the last thirty years have attempted to achieve this. That some of them have failed to do so, does not undermine the unparalleled complexity and demands of the form; when it succeeds, that is proof enough that the musical is art of the highest order.

CHAPTER 5: FOOTNOTES

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CHAPTER 6

A VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS - THE VOICE OF THE MUSICAL

CHAPTER 6

A VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS - THE VOICE OF THE MUSICAL

Having established a theoretical foundation for our evaluation of musical theatre works, we are now able to make assessments of individual shows. However, in choosing the period of this study, the aim is not ultimately to make individual assessments of all the shows within it, but to examine the interesting developments of the period in relation to the four variables identified in our model for analysis:

- i) the ideas artists want to express;
- ii) the discovered devices of artistic expression;
- iii) the arena of presentation;
- and iv) public response.

In doing so, undoubtedly our critical base for value judgements will come into play, most particularly when focusing upon the second variable, where the process of artistic selection is so crucial, but the intention is to give a full picture of the range of musical theatre works within the period, and to enhance understanding of its creative potential.

The first of the four variables is that of the greatest range, and in one respect is as wide as thought

itself, if we accept the ideal that an artist is (or should be) free to express a response to the world around him/her. Yet we have seen that by its very nature, the musical is suited to the expression of ideas which best suit the inherent qualities of the media it employs: that is, its quintessential expressive mode of song.

Given that song is a heightened form of human expression associated with moments of extreme emotion, the musical would seem suited to subjects which relate to heightened emotion or idealism of thought. Even a cursory glance at WEST SIDE STORY will show just how well the musical is suited to this realm of idea and emotion, for it contains the heightened passion and idealism of young romantic love, as well as a wider vision of racial harmony in 'Somewhere'. Such a realm allows for lyricism of thought and expression, and indeed, the concept of romantic love has been frequently used by the musical as the basis of its subject matter. In that sense, WEST SIDE STORY, and many other shows from the period, right through to Andrew Lloyd Webber's ASPECTS OF LOVE are 'romantic' and uphold Lerner's assertion that the musical theatre is:

"a poetic theatre, a romantic theatre, a heroic theatre, a moral theatre and a theatrical theatre."¹

That the musical is a theatrical theatre has been outlined in the last chapter, and likewise, it is undoubtedly poetic in the strictest sense in its transformation of media into artistic elements and subsequently into a unified whole through the process of synthesis. This is the act of 'poesis'. Given the more colloquial understanding of the word 'poetic', we have also seen how the musical has a close affinity with the 'poetic' theatre of the non-musical stage, not least for its own elevated, imaginative language and conventional usages rooted in the media it employs.

Lerner's three central labels however - 'romantic, heroic and moral' - are useful starting points in our examination of the range of ideas which the musical has sought to express since 1957.

Taking WEST SIDE STORY as a starting point, one would certainly consider it heroic, in that Tony's actions in taking a stand against the prevailing violence of gang warfare and in having the courage to act in response to his own emotions even at the risk of his own safety, are those of a hero. Equally, it is romantic both in relation to the concept of romantic love where 'amor vincit omnia', and in relation to a broader definition of romanticism which upholds the ideal; here, that of a world free from racial tension.

Finally, it is moral, in that it leaves the audience with no doubt as to the tragic results of failing to prevent warfare, whether it be on the streets of New York's West Side or in the wider field of nation against nation, race against race, creed against creed, ultimately asking the audience for tolerance, patience and love. Thus it is moral in upholding values which it believes to be vital in our striving to make a better world and which are, in its own terms, 'good'.

A Moral Theatre

In this sense of 'moral' all successful musical theatre works of the period create worlds in which exists a system of values by which 'good' and 'bad' are defined. These need not necessarily be the prevailing morals of the social and cultural background of the audience, yet the morals of the created world will be consistent and the consequences of that moral system will be portrayed in the life of the show. This leads to an ultimate sense of the work presenting the audience with a questioning, or re-evaluation of their own moral sense and a signpost for the moral direction ahead. If the function of the song is to help provide a release or solution to an emotional crisis, then the musical aims to provide a release or direction in relation to a moral dilemma.

Certainly WEST SIDE STORY fulfils this role, as do any number of shows from the period, mostly in line with the changing mores of the prevailing culture of its audience. When this is not the case, as in shows such as COMPANY, HAIR, CHICAGO, or EVITA for example, then the moral dilemma must be extremely skilfully drawn and a resolution drawn if the show is truly to engage its audience.

Lehman Engel suggests that COMPANY fails ultimately in its thought-line by failing to provide any moral direction as to the value of marriage as an institution in contemporary society, when he says of Robert's final song, 'Being Alive':

"I feel that this is not sufficient resolution to the theme of marriage: why or why not?"²

In fact, there were three attempts to provide Robert, the central bachelor figure of the piece, with a final number and the process of finding the appropriate one is a perfect example of the importance for the musical dramatist to understand this capacity of the musical for moral direction, as well as the audience's expectation of it.

The first number was "Marry Me a Little", a brilliant and harshly cynical reaction by Robert to the failed relationships and various marriages around him,

whose depiction makes up the body of the show.

Ultimately, in 'Marry Me a Little' Robert has learned nothing and moved nowhere:

"Marry me a little,
Love me just enough,
Cry but not too often,
Play but not too rough.
Keep a tender distance,
So we'll both be free,
That's the way it ought to be...I'm ready!"

But as Harold Prince points out in his book, Contradictions³, this was not what the show had set out to say in the conception of himself, Stephen Sondheim and George Furth. In spite of a puzzled reaction to the show's intentions, leading some people to mistake its often cynical tone for a condemnation of marriage, Prince still regards it as a fervent plea for interpersonal relationships, even though it acknowledges the manifest difficulties of living together.

'Marry Me a Little' therefore, never made it to performance, but was replaced with the less cynical, but sharply ironic 'Happily Ever After':

"Someone to need you too much,
Someone to read you too well,
Someone to bleed you of all the
things you don't want to tell,
That's Happily Ever After,
Ever, ever, ever after in hell!"

Unfortunately, audience expectation was not one of sharp irony, and in previews in Boston, it became clear that most of the audience were taking the song at face value. Ever ready to learn from seeing drama in action before an audience, Sondheim replaced it with the soaring ballad, 'Being Alive':

"Somebody crowd me with love,
Somebody force me to care,
Somebody let me come through,
I'll always be there as frightened as you
To help us survive
Being alive, being alive, being alive."

Though 'Being Alive' went some way to providing a more satisfying ending for the audience, the creators were still not entirely happy, for they felt it imposed a happy ending on the show - (Robert has decided he wants to get married?) - where it should have remained ambiguous. It is, however, precisely this courting of ambiguity which leads to the lack of moral direction Engel identifies, and allowed several critics to admire the craft of the creators yet find the show 'cold'. In the final analysis, it seems as if the creators have ducked out of their obligation by posing a question and making no attempt at an answer. They may ultimately have produced a more ambiguous ending than they supposed. However fine the craft, the lack of commitment to the musical as a moral art denies it much of its power to communicate successfully with its audience.

A similar example can be found in EVITA, which, despite containing the best work of both Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber to date, fails to give any direction as to how, ultimately, the writers wish us to view Eva Peron. Rice's lyrics have a stylish wit:

"I came from the people,
They need to adore me,
So Christian Dior me,
From my head to my toes.
I need to be dazzling,
I've got to be Rainbow High,
They need their excitement.....
And so do I!"

Similarly, Lloyd Webber's music skilfully contrasts driving Latin rhythms ('Big Apple') and political fervour ('A New Argentina') with intimate lyricism ('I'd Be Surprisingly Good For You') and religious devotion ('Santa Eva'). Perhaps most brilliant is the dazzle of Evita's appearance 'On the Balcony of the Cassa Rosada' when she subdues the chanting populace with the ironically self-effacing 'Don't Cry For Me Argentina', even as she is dressed in the white satin ball-gown and dazzling jewellery of pseudo-royalty. Yet again, however, the audience was seduced by the visual image and the lyricism of the music into feeling sympathetic to the central character even as it should be astounded by her manipulation of the people to her own ends. In spite of an attempt to give the piece a political

resonance in the drawing of Che Guevara as an everyman/narrator figure, the piece ultimately fails to decide whether it wants us to admire, or despise the woman and cheats its audience of any sense of moral direction. Ambiguous as the enigma of Eva Peron may have been, it nonetheless makes a singularly unsatisfying dramatic experience.

The emphasis on moral direction is significantly pronounced in Hustoles' categories of Musical Theatre Drama, where the emphasis is upon psychologically realistic characters, since they face moral dilemmas in the world in which they live, yet the archetypal figures of Musical Theatre Comedy are equally capable of revealing moral direction to us, even if in Comedy the emphasis is upon reaffirming the existing moral values of the audience rather than questioning them. Certainly Dolly Levi in HELLO DOLLY! allows us to reaffirm our belief in striving for a 'perfect match', even if we have to cheat a little to get what we want. In Dolly's world, such cheating is morally acceptable when the intention is a 'good one' - that of upholding marriage as a worthwhile institution.

At its most obvious, perhaps GODSPELL upholds the moral values inherent in the gospels and prevailing Christian belief, simply by representing the doctrine of the gospels in a modern idiom.

Whatever the aesthetic emphasis, the musical is at its most expressive when it acknowledges itself as a moral art. Whatever its subject, it must acknowledge its own moral values and attempt to convince the audience of them. The audience or any member of it may violently disagree with a show's prevailing morality - one has only to recall the outrage that greeted HAIR when it first opened - yet, given that commitment, the show will be rooted in that necessary bond of the dramatic art between performance and audience. When it fails to do so, the musical theatre seems vapid, vacuous, self-centred, trivial and purposeless. It should be no wonder then, that people feel distanced from shows such as COMPANY or EVITA in spite of all their artistry, for in song's ability to effect feeling lies the musical theatre's potential to give moral purpose to our lives and a sense of direction distilled from the morass of our day to day existence. In failing to recognise this, or to successfully harness it, both shows are at war with their own media of expression and as such, disobey the first principle in selection of the Book - that it must 'sing', not only in terms of individual theatrical moments, but in spirit as well.

A Romantic Theatre

In a similar way, the musical must be considered a romantic theatre. Not only in the limited sense as it refers to the concept of romantic love, though almost all shows make capital of that concept, as can be seen from a glance at Hustoles' identification of primary or secondary romantic couplings as features of the sub-genres he outlines. Yet it is in the use of song as heightened expression of emotion that the musical theatre must be considered Romantic in a broader sense, for song is a natural urge to soar above reality. As Victor Hugo writes in his 1827 preface to Cromwell:

"There are no other rules than the general laws of nature, which soar above the whole field of art."

In that sense, the natural urge to sing is an imperative of submission to the demands of emotion, freed from restriction and social order. As such it is suited to dealing with the extraordinary, the special and the ideal. Milton Marx writes that:

"the Romantic spirit is expansive, exuberant, vibrant with life; it gives man high aspirations, and the vision and power to attain them or try to attain them; it colours his existence with excitement and suspense. To the Romanticist, the unattainable and the unknowable are the most important things in the world."⁴

Indeed, most musicals do not show us the truth of life as it is, but ultimately as it could and should be. Even in the tragic reality of WEST SIDE STORY lies the vision of a peaceful, perfect world in 'Somewhere'. In the Romantic world of the musical, man can aspire to be more than himself and integrity reigns in a kingdom of values and dreams.

The long-standing tradition of the musical has been that of a Romantic spirit, in line with its place as a moral form, yet its essence is at its most distilled in those shows which we can identify as belonging to Hustoles' category of Musical Romance.

Interestingly, almost all these shows have a darker tone to them than most musicals, which is very far removed from the immediate colloquial perception of what makes something Romantic. The popular notion is more closely related to the idea of sentimentality, and romantic comes to mean 'slushy, trite, simplistic or overdone'. Nothing could be further from the truth. To view Romanticism in a detrimental, negative sense is to deny the very need for a musical theatre.

In the Musical Romance, the darker tone only serves to highlight the luminosity of the central vision, usually in the conception of the protagonist. In CAMELOT, it is Arthur's vision of a realm where 'Might'

is used for 'Right', which drives the whole show forward, and though his own attempt at realising the vision is destroyed by the conflict between his human emotion and his duty as upholder of that vision, nevertheless, the vision lives on in young Tom of Warwick to become the stuff of legend.

And what could be more directly expressive of the Romantic vision than Don Quixote's desire to:

"dream The Impossible Dream....
to reach the unreachable star,"

in MAN OF LA MANCHA? Likewise, in SUNDAY IN THE PARK WITH GEORGE, both older and younger George strive against the odds to achieve the goal of perfection in their art.

When the Romantic vision is in line with values which we as audience uphold, and when it is realised in line with our own moral sense, then it is easy for us to sympathise with the Romantic protagonist and to accept the vision as our own. It is all the more remarkable then, that in SWEENEY TODD, Hugh Wheeler and Stephen Sondheim manage to present us with a protagonist whose vision we are drawn to understand, if not with whom to sympathise, even in light of the fact that Sweeney's reputation is one based upon murder and seemingly

senseless violence. In that, it is probably the most skilful manipulation to date of the musical theatre's Romanticism. In spite of the mass slaughter of the piece, the show's vision (and Sweeney's) is of a truly just society in which all humans are holders of equal status. In contrast to the other Musical Romances outlined, SWEENEY TODD does not have its protagonist's vision living on at the end (within the inner life of the created world on stage), but in the epilogue turns the responsibility for the upholding of the vision onto the audience, thus providing the moral direction necessary for the satisfaction of the audience:

"To seek revenge may lead to hell,
But everyone does it, and seldom as well
As Sweeney."

Particularly in the work of Stephen Sondheim, which is often noted for its tone of disillusion and darker colouring, (debatable as such terms are), nevertheless, the essence is still deeply Romantic in that the shows are life-affirming. They are not necessarily an affirmation of the quality of life as we know it, but rather encourage us to think and question our world with the aim of improving the day-to-day nature of our existence. As Kislán says:

"the romantic vision celebrates forever the wonder of living."⁵

In a certain respect, Sondheim (together with his collaborators) may prove to be the most truly Romantic of all musical dramatists in that he clearly believes in the innate intelligence of the human being and in his willingness to initiate change for the better. Yet what is crucial in the musical, both as a Romantic and a moral form, is that such ideas are always going to be inextricably linked with the contemporary society from which shows emerge. We will examine that fundamental link in the final chapter, but Kislán re-emphasises the basic point:

"since great art not only mirrors but shapes a culture, we must not underestimate the impact of musical theatre as a popular and subtle force in the argument for moral direction and breadth of vision in an increasingly confused and impolite world."⁶

Whatever one's particular view on Romanticism as a tenable philosophy, it is impossible to deny that the musical theatre is one of its most suitable expressive outlets, able as it is to invest the simplest of ideas with a radiant emotional power and glowing sentiment allowing the breadth of philosophical thought to become personal belief powerfully expressed.

Let me here try to clarify the use of the terms sentiment and sentimentality in relation to the musical theatre, for a distinction must be made. The musical

theatre is the natural ally of sentiment, since song is rooted in a direct emotional response. Sentiment is crucial to the musical for this is a world of feelings, and sentiment is defined as an 'abstract feeling' or 'a tendency to be moved by feeling rather than by reason'. This tendency is certainly true of the musical, even when it tackles complicated ideas as subject matter or re-addresses its function for its audience. At all times it aims to reveal its secrets by allowing the audience to become 'knowers through feeling'. The fact that on too many occasions the musical has fallen foul of this 'tendency' and seemingly abandoned reason altogether should not detract from the basic truth that sentiment is at the heart of the musical - and moreover, no apology is required for that fact.

'Sentimental', therefore, should merely be the adjective derived from the noun, yet its usage is almost invariably used in a negative, derogatory sense. Even a dictionary definition gives us 'foolishly tender', and more dangerously, 'romantic': and this is really the point. Romanticism is not sentimental. If a show's subject is 'romantic' it captures the essence of mankind's ability to dream, for conceptual thought, and whether fulfilled or disillusioned, nonetheless it will evoke sentiment and utilise it in shaping the inner life of the drama. If it is 'sentimental' then it is so

because it fails to live up to the demands of that inner life, usually in terms of credibility of action and character, and creates a false theatrical moment whose sole aim is to evoke a particular kind of emotional response. It is an imbalance of aesthetic consideration, where the desire for emotional evocation and display overrides the demands of dramatic credibility, thus cheapening the power of the moment. In both creation and criticism it is crucial to understand these two specific uses of 'sentiment' and 'sentimental' as applied to the musical theatre, and to realise that the former is a natural part of the musical's romanticism where the latter is its enemy.

Romanticism as part of the inherent expressive quality of the musical theatre has continued to hold sway over choice of subject throughout the period since 1957. In its broadest sense it has encompassed the anti-war sentiments of HAIR, the bitter-sweet couplings of A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC, the prospect of racial harmony of WEST SIDE STORY, the notion of collective responsibility of INTO THE WOODS, the vision of an equal, just society of SWEENEY TODD, the reassertion of youthful idealism of MERRILY WE ROLL ALONG, the anti-Fascism of CABARET, the individual will to succeed of HOW TO SUCCEED IN BUSINESS WITHOUT REALLY TRYING, the

striving for perfection in art of SUNDAY IN THE PARK WITH GEORGE, the anti-colonialism of PACIFIC OVERTURES, the broadest view of love in LA CAGE AUX FOLLES, the sustaining of the Jewish culture in FIDDLER ON THE ROOF, the devotion of the dancer in A CHORUS LINE, the triumph of 'razzle-dazzle' in CHICAGO, and the laying to rest the ghosts of the past in FOLLIES. In every case the treatment has been radically different in terms of dramatic structure, theatrical convention, and style, but all have a vision of a better world at their heart and present that vision in their own terms. As such, the musical is as much of a Romantic theatre as it ever was; indeed, it may be even more so, for as the last chapter will demonstrate, it may well be that now audiences have a greater need for Romanticism in the musical theatre than at any other time in its history. Regardless of whether that is true or not, the spirit of Romanticism continues to live in the musical theatre.

Lerner, of course, suggests that the musical serves the functions he outlines "by default"⁷, as a kind of voice in the wilderness, but he seems not to take account of the fact that the natural properties of song make the musical the best possible form for serving these functions. What he tries to identify is the incapacity of the non-musical theatre to serve these functions with the same economy of means and directness of effect as the musical.

Conversely, it has been suggested that the musical is incapable of carrying complex ideas and is confined to the primary colours of human experience. This may have been true in the haphazard amalgams first accorded the label of musical comedy, but in the last thirty years, the musical has begun to demonstrate its potential for expressing ideas as complex as any in the non-musical theatre, and of developing its own conventions in line with those ideas which parallel the development of theory in the modern theatre as a whole.

Ideas And Issues

Though the musical is inherently suited to description as a moral and romantic theatre, that does not of course mean that the non-musical theatre is not capable of dealing with such subjects, and yet there are several reasons why the musical has been successful at dealing with ideas and issues in a way that has not been possible in the non-musical drama.

Firstly, of course, it possesses an over-riding emotionalism, allowing for direct expression of ideas which would seem too bald in the non-musical theatre, and a compactness of form that can capture a whole world in a few bars of a song.

Secondly, the non-musical theatre has been dominated in this century by the concept of realism (though by no means exclusively) and its basic demand for a theatrical representationalism, whereas the musical's acknowledgement of its own theatricality and its ability for direct presentation makes for a completely different expressive ability, suited to a drama of ideas rather than a representational one.

Hal Prince astutely points to a third reason why, in America, the musical came to deal with issues at a time when the McCarthy witch-hunts created an atmosphere of restraint and self-censorship among writers for the non-musical theatre.⁸ In addition, he points out, due to the musical's history of being a broad entertainment form appealing to a wide audience, the conveyance of ideas through entertainment to a captive and probably unsuspecting audience made for a far more effective method of communication and a suitable arena for debate of issues.

Of course, from the influential SHOWBOAT onwards, the musical had shown itself capable of tackling social issues, whether through the power of drama or the targets of satire, as in the Pulitzer Prize-winning OF THEE I SING, yet the range of issues tackled has greatly expanded from the time of WEST SIDE STORY onwards, as

the musical discovered its social conscience. In addition, it has grown to reflect the different emphases of the non-musical theatre, as they are reflective of the philosophical shifts which underpin all shifting tendencies in art.

Modernism And The Musical

Both in relation to its expressive properties and its place alongside the non-musical theatre (as well as taking into account its historical roots), the modern musical has most often been seen as conservative, lagging behind developments in the non-musical theatre, yet in the last thirty years there have been many shows which are significant in their expansion of the range of ideas which the musical has sought to express. We have already seen that many of the conventions and prototypal traditions of the musical have developed in relation to the theatrical concept of realism. Shows such as THE SOUND OF MUSIC, GYPSY, FIDDLER ON THE ROOF, HELLO DOLLY, MAME, APPLAUSE and OLIVER! are firmly rooted in that tradition, despite their many presentational moments. Each scene is in effect given a realistic locale and the inner logic of the show's created world reflects the logic of everyday life. All of which may be considered somewhat odd if we remember that the natural tendency of the musical is for direct

expression. Surely then, the musical would seem well placed to fashion itself according to its own free-wheeling laws of rhythmic synthesis as a form best suited to those non-musical theatre forms related to the concept of modernism in the theatre, and those schools of thought on dramatic theory which are non-realistic in mode.

As a form and a stylistic tendency, we might well call the musical expressionistic, yet it also has potential in relation to the broader movement of Expressionism we most readily associate with German drama between the turn of the century and 1930. In spite of its Shakespearian source, the addition of the 'Somewhere' number to WEST SIDE STORY is highly Expressionist, as the two young lovers trapped in a small room share a vision of release. As they do do, the walls of the room part, revealing streets, whose walls also divide as the lovers begin to run, until at last the city is banished and they find themselves at the start of a new dawn where there is happiness and harmony. In such a scene we can easily recognise the vision of Toller or Kaiser, and the fundamental Expressionist belief of a new dawn for Mankind and a new ecstasy. METROPOLIS, recently in London's West End, is based on an Expressionist film of the same name, though ultimately, not least due to the weakness of its score,

the piece undercuts the fundamental philosophy behind the original, substituting only scenic spectacle and theatrical trickery in its place. Nevertheless, the very fact that Expressionism as a school of thought was in effect a kind of new Romanticism makes it a potential valuable ally of the musical. The fact that so few shows have consciously recognised the fact leaves that potential wide open for future development.

In a similar way, the musical has never fully expressed the idea of Surrealism in its potential range of expressive modes, most likely because the dissociative imagery of surrealism does not readily subjugate itself to the rigid laws of musico-dramatic structure, and yet the principle of rhythmic synthesis would seem the perfect means through which to bring theatrical order to such dissociation. The most frequent references the musical makes to surrealism are its references to dreams, usually in the form of a realistically placed dream sequence. Such dream sequences have been used since OKLAHOMA! with Agnes De Mille's famous dream ballet, and the dream of Tevye in FIDDLER ON THE ROOF, when he fabricates a dream in order to convince his wife of a particular groom for one of their daughters, is in the same vein, with its grotesque and larger-than-life creation of Fruma Sarah returning

from the grave. MISS SAIGON, the very latest addition to the West End scene, has the title character's brother return from the grave and conjure up the moment when the Americans quit Saigon, leaving many unprotected Vietnamese behind them, in order to convince her of Chris, her former American lover's unreliability. Yet in all these cases, the dream effect is still rooted in realism, not truly based in surrealism, which supplants the logic of realism by a view which sees the world as being made up of completely dissociated imagery and experience which we merely choose to view in relation to our individual rationale.

It is of course true that the very nature of the world of song and dance is unreal in itself and thus suggests a dreamlike state even when it is given a realistic context. For that reason, it might be argued, surrealism, like expressionism, is already inherent in the musical and therefore unsuited to expression through it. Yet there is one fine example which proves this is not the case.

FOLLIES boldly combines several different planes of reality on one stage. Firstly, there is the old theatre and the party taking place to say farewell before it is knocked down. Then there is the inner life of the four central characters, two couples who meet again at the

reunion. In amongst them wander their four younger selves, at first unnoticed, and then as the evening progresses, confronted by the older characters. In addition there wander ghostly showgirls from past Follies which have taken place in the theatre, representatives of an era which at the start of the show is gone but not forgotten. As the show progresses the different planes of reality converge, until, in a stunning coup de theatre, past, present and future meet in a recreated Follies sequence which has the four central figures confronting their own personal 'follies' of the mind, finally laying waste the past, rescuing the present from the brink of a kind of collective nervous breakdown and allowing them the chance of a happier future. To date it is the only musical which has gone beyond the superficial notion of the dream sequence and begun to explore the very notion of planes of reality in a surrealist manner. Again there is vast potential for further exploration, though primarily in the juxtaposing of imagery on different planes of reality rather than in the subconscious imagery of the surreal.

One of the key traditions of the musical theatre has been the employment of the 'backstage' musical, using the theatre itself as a setting and in a broader sense as a basis for examining the nature of role play: a form of metatheatre. At its most naive the musical

has used this as a metaphor for the ethic of success, and in the final chapter we shall examine how that is intrinsically linked with the cultures, especially the American culture, from which it emerges, yet in relation to broader ideas of the theatre and its relationship to the world, a show like APPLAUSE has clear parallels to the work of Pirandello and Genet, though admittedly the musical has dealt with this image on a human basis rather than a broadly political one. APPLAUSE comes down firmly on the side of basic human relationships rather than the convoluted interaction of created persona as represented by the notion of theatre, where CHICAGO demonstrates how easily the adoption of showbiz persona is capable of unleashing great power for the adopter, blinding society to the faults and corruption behind the mask, in this case even to murder, as Roxie Hart and her prison pal Velma Kelly, convicted murderesses, become triumphant symbols of personality cult. In A CHORUS LINE, the dancers endure a hard audition requiring them to expose their human weaknesses and strengths as they struggle for acceptance into a system which is ultimately dehumanising, existing only to back a 'star'. In ANYONE CAN WHISTLE, the image of mask, persona and fraud run throughout the show as a corrupt mayoress and her cronies on the town council stage-manage a fraudulent miracle in order to revive the

town's flagging economy. The multiplicity of deception and game-playing are heightened by the confusion of the townsfolk with a visiting group of inmates from the local lunatic asylum, until all sense of sanity and stability are undermined. This is as close as the musical has come to a play like Genet's 'The Balcony', even if the ultimate resolution is quite different. By the end of Act One of ANYONE CAN WHISTLE, the audience's sense of the reality of their own theatrical experience has been stretched to its boundaries when Dr. Hapgood, spotlit, turns to the audience and says: "You are all quite mad." The lights behind him come up and the entire cast is revealed sitting in theatre seats applauding the audience. Where, we wonder, does the theatre begin and life end? The barriers are well and truly down, and the musical has moved away from easy thought, simple story-telling and reassuring entertainment, into the dark territory of modernism.

It grows even darker in relation to the theory of existentialism, which many consider the major addition of the twentieth century to the range of philosophical discourse. The musical would seem at complete odds with existentialism, given its view of senselessness of existence, lack of purpose and order, with the only possible meaning being rooted entirely in an

individual's rejection of the myths, structures and Gods of the world s/he lives in and acceptance of personal responsibility for one's own actions. By contrast, the musical is suited to optimism, hope, romance, the mythic and the heroic. Yet it has proved capable of taking on board some of these philosophical aspects of existentialism, most notably in the happy alliance between the Romantic notion of self-will and achievement and existentialism's emphasis upon the individual view and subsequent logic of the fact that only when an individual realises that any attempt at making sense of the world is hopeless can there be hope for the individual. This is dark Romanticism of the kind noted in Hustoles' Musical Romance definition, simply given a specific root in a sense of life's futility. The dark heroes of Musical Romance are not ultimately that far removed from Camus' *L'Étranger*, most notably in SWEENEY TODD, where Sweeney rejects all established sense of social order and morality - the myths and Gods of his world - and, fired by a sense of his own, and ultimately mankind's, impotence, vents his anger on an unsuspecting world, fully prepared to take the consequences of his action. Given that ultimately he realises what he has done and shortly after is killed himself, makes him as much a victim of a cruel and arbitrary universe as the rest of the bodies in the bloodbath. Even Sweeney's

vision of vengeful justice is futile in the face of such cruelty. The only characters in the show who have any presentiment of Sweeney's plan are the Beggar Woman and young Tobias, both of whom are considered mad. When the lunatics escape from Bedlam in Act Two, they also sense that the world has no order, sense has deserted us and apocalypse is at hand:

"City on fire, rats in the street
And the lunatics yelling at the moon,
It's the end of the world: yes!"

And indeed, by the end of the show, the world seems a pretty hopeless place, with only three of the principal characters being left alive, one of whom is mad (Tobias) and likely to be blamed for the bloodbath, while Joanna and her young amour, Antony, remain blindly naive to the real reasons for such violence. The lack of their recognition might seem to suggest that the only way forward for mankind is to remain blind to the cruelties of our world, yet they are clearly foolish characters, and in that sense add to the overwhelming sense of despair. However, the show remains firmly rooted in the moral and romantic vein of the musical for it contains the vision of its creators who seem to believe that by portraying such cruelty its audience will be forced to reassess their understanding of the world and to take the responsibility to live as a result of that

reassessment. Such a responsibility is in accord with the later development of the existential philosophers who in spite of their view of futility nevertheless, were able to live meaningful lives and to continue to express their ideas.

In addition, such a view of the possible effect of SWEENEY TODD suggests a belief in the Brechtian or didactic view of theatre, that it does have the power to effect change. The popular view of Brecht's theories is that he sought to distance his audience from the emotional response to his work, and this would seem to be at odds with the very heart of the musical theatre. Sondheim himself says:

"I seek to draw the audience into the show through music, whereas Brecht tried to distance them."⁹

Yet this is a misconception, and a somewhat naive understanding of Brecht's ideas. Certainly he disapproved of a blindly emotional response and the tendency of the theatre to act as a narcotic, as many musicals do it may be argued. But to suggest that he did not understand and successfully employ techniques which prompted emotional response would be to deny his very theatricality. To achieve this he used a range of popular theatre techniques and traditions, not least that of music and the singing actor. Particularly in

collaboration with Kurt Weill there are many examples of where music (and song in particular), is used to elicit a directly emotional response from the audience. It is primarily the function of these songs and the context they are given which makes the audience consider their emotional response in relation to broader ideas, making them think even as they are moved and entertained.

Often Weill's songs and those of Brecht's other collaborators are used to question or to serve as comment upon an action or situation. The musical has found many ways to utilise this technique. Both A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE FORUM, and COMPANY use this technique of commenting upon the action, in the first case because the songs themselves provide interludes to the fast pace of the farcical plot and expand on situations and attitudes which arise from it, and in the second case because the creators of the show felt the characters that librettist George Furth had created would not sing in the representational mode of the scenes as written, hence they become a kind of chorus commenting upon attitudes to relationships and marriage even as they observe the action of the scenes.

CABARET, too, consciously referring to German Cabaret contemporary with Brecht and Weill's collaboration uses the M.C. and Kit Kat Club numbers in a similar way to comment, often ironically, on the shifting political situation beyond the Club's doors.

It is interesting to note here that the work of Stephen Sondheim and his collaborators is most often exemplary of this tendency of the musical to explore new means of expression in line with broader developments of dramatic and theatrical theory. Each of his shows, though perhaps unconsciously, is as much an education of the audience in relation to their expectations of the musical as it is the communication of idea through its own discovered form. As such it demands an audience prepared to think as well as to be entertained, and has led to frequent criticisms of over-intellectualising the musical. Such criticism attempts to confine the musical to set functions and as such denies it its place as art. Sondheim's approach, though it may be self-proclaimed as being completely the opposite one to that of Brecht, nevertheless achieves much the same effect in performance, and further consideration of the similarities would, I believe, prove most revealing, though there is not enough space to tackle it in the scope of this study. Yet the potential for a comparison is evidenced in that, in every show, Sondheim and his collaborators attempt to fashion their conventions of expression to suit the ideas being expressed, and through this process aims to prompt a considered view of the world from their audience, alerted by techniques and conventions (allied to rigorous craftsmanship) which never panders to comfortable expectation.

In PACIFIC OVERTURES the creators adopt many of the principles of the Kabuki Theatre as expressive of the Japanese viewpoint of American influence in the development of their nation, and as a technique to make the audience be aware of alternative perspectives on the theme other than the one they have brought into the theatre.

In ANYONE CAN WHISTLE, given its theme of madness, there are key moments fashioned in relation to undercutting the expected modes of communication. Much of the material for Mayoress Cora Hoover is pastiche material drawn from the traditions of musical comedy, intended to express the fraudulent nature of her public persona and course of action, and in the Finale to Act One, the musical comes close to absurdism in its deconstruction of musical theatre language. It combines both verbal and musical clichés and homilies in a developing cacophony of sound, until the bantering of Groups 'A' and 'One' becomes nonsensical even as the harmonic structures of the orchestra become evermore clashing and non-diatonic. As the characters sing:

"Grass is green, sky is blue,
Who is what and which is who?"

we know we are not in the comfortable world of the ballad and by the end of the number the deconstruction

of the musical theatre song is so complete that one is inevitably reminded of Ionesco's 'The Bald Prima Donna'.

Much of the humour in the musical theatre has been rooted in a sense of the absurd, with an emphasis on the ridiculous, and Hustoles' genres often emphasise the importance of ridicule in the standard features of specific categories. When STOP THE WORLD - I WANT TO GET OFF first opened critics were struck by similarities to Beckett's 'Waiting For Godot' in the appearance, demeanour and inter-relationship of Littlechap and friend. Here the musical has clearly become pure allegory and its circus setting another example of metatheatre. Similarly THE ACT utilised the 'star' quality and talents of Liza Minelli in a concert-like piece to parallel the story of an imaginary 'star': theatrical reality and theatrical unreality become one.

In all the above ways the musical has shown itself capable of taking on board the contemporary theories and philosophies of all modern drama, yet in one respect the musical has been able to go further than its non-musical counterpart. Given its basic principle of rhythmic synthesis, and its level of heightened emotion, the musical has been able to expand the concept of metatheatre to allow for a kind of abstract presentation of philosophic thought. This is most clearly focused in

the most successful of those shows which are conceived as collections of songs, often linked by theme or origin. At its weakest, this form is really traditional revue; when it is shaped according to thematic or philosophical development it creates a new unity and as such comes under the heading of Hustoles' Musical Revue.

MARRY ME A LITTLE was conceived as a collection of songs by Stephen Sondheim which had never made it to the finished performances of his shows, and was given a narrative thread through the device of two characters in separate apartments, one directly above the other, reflecting on human relationships on a Saturday Night, while ironically at home alone. The irony is heightened by the fact that theatrically they occupy the same room. Though the piece begins simply in relation to their attitudes to human relationships, it develops into a broader consideration of human existence, the polarities of which come in the songs, 'Silly People' and 'There Won't Be Trumpets'. In the former the man is plagued by the thought of man's mortality:

"Don't they know, don't they,
What it means, dying?
Silly people....."

His desire for human warmth is rooted in mankind's awareness of his own fragility:

"Float and flow,
And down we go.....
To drown."

In contrast such a bleak view is challenged by the woman's vision of a Messiah - the blind leap of faith that the existentialist view cannot make:

"Don't know when,
Don't know where,
And I can't even say that I care!
All I know is
The minute you turn
And he's suddenly there!
You won't need trumpets."

Such a view is reflected in the end of Sondheim and Laurents' ANYONE CAN WHISTLE, when Hapgood and Nurse Fay Apple sing 'With So Little To Be Sure Of':

"Crazy business this, this life we live in,
Can't complain about the time we're given,
With so little to be sure of in this world,
Hold me!"

and they find that physical connection which is also a meeting of the spirit. Yet Hapgood and Fay do not stay together, as he turns and leads the citizens of the town, Pied-Piper-like, to a new miracle, a new beginning. Fay realising he is her Messiah goes to follow him at which point the fraudulent fountain issues forth as a real one, as a refreshing symbol of true love and new hope.

In STARTING HERE, STARTING NOW, the form is taken to its peak with no narrative structure and no consistency of character, yet a clear line of thought sustains this collection of songs by Maltby and Shire.

As the opening number states 'The Word Is Love' and the man and two women who make up the cast are eager to discover its fullest existence, 'Starting Here, Starting Now'. They launch into the flush of their first, fine, careless rapture but all the next five songs present us with people who are locked into the intensity of their own experience and who make no real contact with other human beings, even though they sense fulfilment is there, 'Just Across The River'. 'We Can Talk To Each Other' sings the man, yet never for a second allowing his partner to say a word. Such an approach to relationships can only prompt separation, either physical or emotional. In 'Crossword Puzzle', a woman tries to take her mind off the betrayal and departure of Hecky, her lover, by burying herself in the Sunday Times Crossword, which only makes her realise that it was her superior intellectual attitude that caused him to leave in the first place. In 'Autumn', another woman senses loss more painfully and permanently:

"Though the breeze is still
I feel the chill of Autumn
In the air."

The hardest part of separation is removing the memories of the good times which are recalled by little details of everyday life, and the man struggles hard:

"I don't remember Christmas, and I don't remember you!"

Yet are those perfect relationships we are told about, and that couple whose marriage has been so stable for thirty five years so loving, so perfect? 'I Don't Believe It', the cast sings; such images are false. The romanticism of 'I Hear Bells', though, gets no more positive response from the world:

"Call me mad? Well, of course you will,"

sings the man who can hear bells and music everywhere, even in things which emit no sound, while a woman is so determined to uphold feminine beauty as the road to happiness in love, that she too goes quietly (and then not so quietly!) mad, her neurosis spilling out of her powder-puff all over the unsuspecting client in the beautician's chair. The upholding of perfect ideals in relationships is only a route to madness. What is vital is a determination to discover, respect and love one's own inner self, so that one may be 'Pleased With Myself', as the last song in Act One proclaims.

Given that awareness of self, one is now ready to make real contact with the world and Act Two opens with a theatrical demonstration of this attitude in 'Hey There Fans', and 'Girl Of The Minute', while in 'I'm A Girl You Should Know', a woman progresses from a slightly anxious attention-seeker to a robust air of self-confidence, preparing her with a readiness to 'Travel'.

Yet life can still pass us by and we are left observing from the sidelines if we are only concerned with self-strength. 'Watching The Big Parade Go By' and 'Flair' both have people wondering where they got left behind and what has happened to the prospect of love. A woman appears and in a strident attack asks, 'What About Today?' Having cast off all idealised views of love and relationships and having discovered a new strength of self inside, one is still left with:

"A lot of toasts tomorrow,
But none of them ever say,
What about today?"

The only way forward is to take the risk of pain and disappointment along with the hope of love and joy. 'One Step' is all it takes, and though the journey may not be easy, the experience will be rewarding. With such a positive attitude to Life's adventure, we may safely pray:

"All my lifetime lies before me,
Please God let it start,"

for 'Today Is The First Day Of The Rest Of My Life' and one can sense 'A New Life Coming', 'Starting Here, Starting Now'.

Maltby and Shire are rooted in the Romantic world of the musical, but never without one foot firmly planted in a world which frequently views optimism and hope as signs of naive escapism or even madness. Many of these songs, though delightfully entertaining, have anger bubbling beneath the surface, and the contrasts of the show's rhythmic line and musical colouring allow for a fully satisfying unity to emerge in performance, presenting the audience with a challenge - the challenge of living with hope and faith.

In that sense it echoes a strong shift in the musical theatre of the last thirty years towards a spiritual role. Uplifting and entertaining the musical may always have been, diverting certainly, yet many shows have sought to positively embrace the idea of spirituality on an almost religious plane. As far back as 'You'll Never Walk Alone' in CAROUSEL, the stirring anthem has held a place in the musical, and 'Climb Every Mountain' from THE SOUND OF MUSIC echoes its religious fervour, amplified by its being given to the character

of the Mother Abbess in the convent to which Maria has returned in time of emotional torment.

Robert Hewison, in a perceptive piece of criticism in the Sunday Times, points to the veiled religious content of Andrew Lloyd Webber's work.¹⁰ JOSEPH AND THE AMAZING TECHNICOLOUR DREAM COAT and JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR are, of course, actual Biblical subjects, but in EVITA, despite Rice's determination to give the show a hard-edged bite, Lloyd Webber's soaring lyricism related to the character of Eva Peron successfully ensures her martyrdom in the eyes of the audience. Where Rice's eye is critical, Lloyd Webber's ear is transcendental, hence the show's confusion and lack of moral direction. In truth, Lloyd Webber's religious element is more of a non-specific spirituality, and the plots he has devised with less astute collaborators than Tim Rice turn on the idea of a personal transfiguration, from JOSEPH, where:

"There's a light at the end of the tunnel."

and faith is all in a land where 'Any Dream Will Do', to CATS, where a cat is to be chosen to ascend to the 'heavy side layer'. Hewison points out that by the time we get to STARLIGHT EXPRESS:

"We have a full-blown trinitarian theology. Rusty who is 'earth, air, fire and water', enters the race in place of his father (significantly a gospel singer); he suffers doubt, and temporary defeat at the hands of a Judas figure, C.B., but at last comes to faith in 'a brand new power, a brand new light the Starlight Express. But, in line with born-again evangelical doctrine, the Starlight Express is not only the spirit, but Rusty himself. How conscious any of the shows' creators are of this is hard to say, but its subconscious operation helps to account for the feeling of satisfaction this show evidently gives."¹¹

It is probably as true that Lloyd Webber has no conscious aim of this religious aspect just as Sondheim has no consciously Brechtian aim, but in both cases the effect is there and in performance their shows could not be more clearly exemplary of the broad range of ideas that the musical has begun to tackle in recent years in relation to its romantic and moral functions.

In exactly the same way, the shows of Jerry Herman and his collaborators have sought to express a romanticism based in the free-wheeling liberalism of modern America. His is a world of true comedy, full of survivors and opportunists at their heart and full of homespun philosophy of a 'Good Ol' American' variety. Dolly Levi wheeling and dealing to make for others and herself a good match in HELLO DOLLY, is just one of a whole host of Herman characters who play life to the full, sometimes beyond the limit, but whose inherent goodness brings them through safe and sound. The title

Character in MAME, and her friends, Mack Sennett in MACK AND MABEL, Albin and his 'family' in LA CAGE AUX FOLLES; all follow in Dolly's footsteps.

The thoughts being expressed in these shows may not be as high-flown as Sondheim's dark Romanticism or Lloyd Webber's spirituality, yet they are no less valid. Just how truly American they are I shall examine in the final chapter, but for now it is only necessary to note such works as representative of the large majority of shows which have not sought to greatly expand the range of ideas touched by the musical in the last thirty years but which nevertheless serve as equally expressive of the musical's moral and romantic core as those which have ventured into further ideological fields.

Clearly, in line with a musical dramatist's individual style, we also identify different creators with individual approaches to the ideological range of the musical theatre's expressive ability; an approach which is coloured by the social and cultural heritage of the dramatist concerned. Equally, it will be affected by a political view.

As already pointed out, the musical has often been criticised for its conservatism, yet if that is true it is only so due to the nature of its vital interaction

between the ideas of the artist and the expectations of its audience - that relationship which defines the musical as a 'popular' form. In addition such a term as 'conservatism' is here relating only to the inherent expressive form of the musical, not to the specific ideological content of individual shows. In relation to content, the musical has been shown to be as broadly political in its frame of reference as the non-musical theatre. The political polarities of left and right are reflected in the two polarities of the musical theatre: the aesthetics of opulence being suited to the expression of conservatism, the upholding of the status quo, the nature of celebration, perhaps, but essentially static, whereas the aesthetic of discovery is in line with the didactic view of theatre, the urge to change, to improve our lives.

In one way the musical has been traditionally associated with individualism, the triumph of the individual spirit against adversity, the comic spirit as already outlined, yet it has often been coloured to lie in line with the principles of capitalism, most usually in the liberal vein of American politics. HELLO DOLLY!, FIDDLER ON THE ROOF, HOW TO SUCCEED IN BUSINESS WITHOUT REALLY TRYING, and CAMELOT are just a few notable examples of this tradition. Others spring readily to mind, not least those which use the theatrical metaphor

of stardom to equate the idea of opportunity for the individual.

In the function of song as reassurance, the musical seems perfectly allied to expressing ideas in support of the status quo; some would say that it can do nothing else. Yet there are many examples from the period of this study which provide challenges to that idea, the most significant of which is undoubtedly HAIR!

HAIR! as a show was conceived as a direct challenge to the prevailing attitudes of the American establishment in relation to the Vietnam war. It was rooted in the questioning of the youth generation concerning the rightness of the war, and attempted to link that attitude to the broader challenges presented by youth culture to the prevailing mores of Establishment America. More than any other show, it attempted also to reject the traditional forms of the musical in an almost anarchic vision and sound of the youth voice. Drugs, sex and rock 'n' roll came to the musical in a forceful way, and HAIR! whatever its artistic merits in terms of craft, became the symbol of a new voice in America. Whatever else HAIR! may have been when it first opened in 1968 it was not comfortable or comforting to the musical theatre establishment, even though a new audience lapped it up.

In similar ways, other shows began to realise that the traditional links between the musical's form and a broadly conservative political view were not inviolable. Indeed, ANYONE CAN WHISTLE, first performed in 1964, four years before HAIR! had attempted to portray a corrupt Establishment in Cora Hoover and her cronies, taking broad sidesweeps at Establishment attitudes along the way, and tilting at fixed social attitudes. Nevertheless, such shows were still rooted in the individualism so often seen and heard in the musical. HAIR! and later shows began to question that individualism or to view it in a critical light.

CHICAGO uses the imagery of individualism triumphant, but always in a bitterly ironic way. In the number 'Class', two of the characters wonder what has happened to the time when humans showed at least some concern for each other, and the show ultimately exposes the myth of individualism as a dangerous one. Likewise, INTO THE WOODS has a First Act which retells and interweaves five fairy tales in which each of the central figures gets what they want, but Act Two again exposes the myth, for it follows that in getting what they wanted the characters have had to cheat or lie a little, and eventually the Piper, here in the form of the wife of the Giant killed by Jack, must be paid.

Ultimately, the blame must be collective, yet it also avows, a collective responsibility is also a collective support and strength.

DREAMGIRLS shows us black culture being shifted in line with the prevailing ethic of individual success, yet it destroys the characters' belief that 'We Are A Family'. Only after experiences of pain and disillusion are they able to re-assert their identity and recognise their mutual need for a common identity. In A CHORUS LINE the individual success ethic is the driving motive of the dancers who are auditioning, yet ultimately they become faceless back-ups to the unidentified star, a star we never see, for this star is the unreachable goal which the system holds up as the object of our striving.

In such ways the musical has sought to expose the myth of individualism which it has so long presented, and which has led critics to associate the musical with the status quo of capitalism. When that myth has persisted it has done so most often in the darker tones of Musical Romance, with the individual pitted against a corrupt status quo.

The one major exception to this shift in the emphasis of the musical has been in the work of Andrew Lloyd Webber, whose shows have always held out the hope of individual success. Not only does STARLIGHT EXPRESS

serve the desire for religious transformation, it presents the image of life as a race, with only one winner. In real life of course it would be the bully Diesel who would win, or the high-technology Electra, but colouring individualism with the musical's traditional liberal veneer, the show has Rusty, who is significantly cast as black, triumphing against all the odds due to his personal faith in the ethic of success.

The politics of the musical have been drawn over the widest possible range, yet in line with its moral and romantic potential, it has always focused on the political in relation to broader philosophical bases, at least as far as content goes, so that the musical has always fashioned its politics in a personal vein allowing for the emotional expression of song. The other political aspect of the musical exists in relation to individual views of a show's function, as pointed out.

As such, SWEENEY TODD is a clear demonstration of the musical's political scope. Drawn from a consciously left-wing reworking of the original melodrama, the musical version paints Sweeney not as a villain but as an anti-hero, whose disillusion and frustration at the injustice and inequality of the world around him lead him to murderous acts of revenge. A Romantic hero of

the underprivileged he may be, and in that sense the show might be considered something of a socialist tract, yet as John Lahr argues, the show fails to follow any commitment to such an overt political viewpoint:

"The production huffs and puffs to give the tale some political resonance; but there is nothing more hollow.... the show is about hate, and hate alone."¹²

Whether we agree that this is really the central issue of the show, what Lahr identifies is that in effect Sweeney is really powerless, impotent to effect real change, as he himself realises by the end of the show, and all the show has left to celebrate is the exquisite craftsmanship of his vengeful work:

"Sweeney pondered and Sweeney planned,
Like a perfect machine 'e planned."

Lahr, sees the show ultimately as being as traditionally American as any other musical. It is, he argues:

"a chronicle in song of the society's growing decrepitude."¹³

and in that sense, though reactionary to historical views of the American system, perhaps, is ultimately as conservative in its view and in its upholding of contemporary mores as any other show.

It is however, equally possible to read the show as the ultimate in Romanticism as already pointed out, linked to the didactic view of the musical's possible function. In that sense it is not in the least conservative.

What this demonstrates is the growing ability of the musical to embody the full political spectrum in its expressive range, leaving it open to political interpretation in a way that the body of musicals before this period are not, (except in relation to their reflection of cultural attitudes as the last chapter will demonstrate). As a consciously political vehicle the musical has proceeded to become more challenging and more complex in the last thirty years.

In line with all drama, so much of the success of the finished work in performance lies in the initial spur to create. If artists have something they want to express urgently enough, then they will try to say it in the best possible way. In the musical, this urge is translated into the Book, and when the Book is made central to the conception, the show can begin to take on its own form, discover its own means of presentation and fulfil its own unique function in relation to its audience.

It is, impossible to completely separate the ideas that the musical has expressed from ideas related to both its form and its function. In ideal terms, a musical can be about anything at all, yet we have seen that it has certain inherent tendencies which govern the choice of subject matter. Nevertheless, few would have thought that the historical detail of the forming of the American Constitution was suitable subject matter for a musical, yet the show 1776 achieved the working of this very material in a highly successful way.

What is demonstrated is that the musical is just as capable of tackling the broader philosophical questions of our world, as well as absorbing and initiating new ideas with regard to the place of the theatre within it, as the non-musical theatre, or for that matter any other art form. In the last thirty years, the musical has become more adventurous and challenging than at any time in its history. In the final chapter we shall see how this expansion is intrinsically linked with the cultural shifts of the time, but for now, let us note the breadth of ideology that the musical encompasses, which conceived as the Book of the show begins that process of creation that will result in the synthesis of the musical theatre.

CHAPTER 6: FOOTNOTES.

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CHAPTER 7

BUILDING BLOCKS - THE FORM OF THE MUSICAL

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Given the initial spur to create, the Artist then has to begin to fashion the ideas in the Book into a workable dramatic structure, utilising the concept of the Act as the central abstraction of all drama, together with an understanding of musico-dramatic structure and theatrical synthesis, in order to develop a blueprint for the living entity. Fundamentally, this is the process of artistic selection by which we may evaluate the artistic merits of a show, in relation to theme, plot, and character, ever mindful of the balance of our polarities. it is also the second of our variables - 'the discovered devices of artistic creation.'

Looking at shows from the proscribed period demonstrates the range of approaches to dramatic structuring utilised by musical dramatists in relation to their ideas, and founded in the concept of synthesis inherent in the Book. We are able to identify units of structure in relation to the dramatic concerns of plotting, character, theme and so on, in each of which there is a balance of expressive media and a balance of aesthetic considerations, with emphasis shifting between

moments of character emphasis and emphasis of action, and between representational and presentational modes.

Considerations of Character.

As our definition of the musical theatre makes clear, one of its identifying factors is a 'consistency of characterisation'. Out of character stems action; hence the fundamental importance of character in the life of the musical theatre. The interaction between characters and their reaction to their world creates the 'story' of the musical (in its broadest possible sense).

When a show is based upon another source, character is already defined by the source material, though transliteration may mean a different approach to the drawing of character; nevertheless, the essences of character are pre-defined. When the show is original, character must be drawn from scratch according to the demands of theme: once decisions regarding characterisation are made, the story emerges in the potential interactions suggested.

Thus the specifics of characterisation are crucial as they will affect the potential developments of the plot. Lehman Engel refers to these specifics as:

"particularisation"¹

and stresses its importance in relation to both lyrics and music, for in the choice of both lyrical and musical language and its developed style lies the essence of character revelation. When particularisation is adhered to as a principle of drawing character, the material becomes non-transferable, and loses its full power when removed from character and situation.

In the show GYPSY, for example, the number, 'Some People', has a directness of verbal language and a musical rhythmic drive that could only be appropriate to Rose and her ruthless determination to get out and get on. Likewise, in FIDDLER ON THE ROOF, Tevye's, 'If I Were A Rich Man', is fashioned explicitly to his individual predicament. Such is the peak of song in the musical theatre. The number, 'Don't Cry For Me Argentina', from EVITA was a hit single in the pop music charts before the show was ever staged, but only in its dramatic context is the full power of the number brought to life, and its levels of irony brought to bear on the listener. In less skilfully crafted shows, lyrics and music become less specifically drawn. Though this may produce good songs, it is not the root of musical theatre. That root is in the specifics of character in action.

Of course, the specifics of character operate between the two polarities of our model; on the one hand as credible characters, rooted in a psychologically realistic approach, and on the other as functional, created to serve the ideas of the Book. The first manifestation of character is linked to the aesthetic of discovery, while the second is based in the aesthetic of display and the ability of the musical to present ideas. Likewise, these two approaches to character-drawing are intrinsically linked to the two modes of theatrical presentation: representational and directly presentational. Hustoles' models for generic definitions make for interesting reading in this light. Musical Drama, Musical Melodrama and Musical Romance place an emphasis on psychologically realistic characters, where the three types of Musical Comedy have a stronger emphasis on plot, with the characters being drawn as recognisable types and serving functions in terms of the plot.

The types of Musical Comedy characters are well-traced by both Ethan Mordden² and Lehman Engel,³ identifying traditions of character emphasis in the musical theatre as a whole, roughly dividing them into two categories. Firstly, and the more significant of the two for the purpose of this study, there are character types rooted in their function within the

inner life of the drama, including the Hero, the Independent Woman, the Confidante, and the Villain. The second group identifies characters in relation to the performers who fulfil their theatrical function - that is, the Star, the Juvenile, the dance Team, the Comic, the Chorus, and the Ensemble.

Many of these labels have direct links back to the popular dramas of the nineteenth century, and certainly in the traditional European operettas from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries these character types are clearly identifiable. Historically, the musical theatre had inherited these basic types.

It is important to note here the distinction between a stereotype and an archetype. A stereotype is a fixed thing, always the same in its repetition. When applied to character in the theatre it refers to the over-emphasis of the character's function or symbolic value in relation to the ideas of the show at the expense of particularisation. As such it is the enemy of good theatrical characterisation, except possibly in the case of satire. Stereotypes utilise clichés of expression and, being instantly recognisable and purely functional, serve no part in moving the drama forward. By contrast, an archetype is the basis of a recognisable type, again linked to the dramatic function of the

character in relation to the whole, but in theatrical terms will be balanced by particularisation, making the character psychologically credible. As an example, one might contrast CATS with STARLIGHT EXPRESS. In the former, the cat characters, originally conceived by T.S. Eliot in his 'Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats' are fully fleshed characters (in spite of their felinity!) even as they are recognisable types. Each cat has its own history, context, strengths and weaknesses, and idiosyncrasies, making them as 'human' as the audience. In STARLIGHT EXPRESS, however, the characters are conceived purely as functional to the central train concept. Diesel is never more than 'Rolling Stock', Electra 'AC/DC, and Belle, 'the sleeping car'. Even Rusty, as the central character is never presented as any more than the underdog hoping to make good. such characters are transparent on their first entrance, and as such, can play no part in creating the drama, confined merely to acting out the race, in this case four times (in varying combinations) throughout the show. We know from the outset that Rusty will win; the only interest can be in how. Given such stereotyped drawing of character we are left with nothing but the thrill of the hydraulic spectacle, dancing roller-skates and toy trains to fill our evening. It can be little wonder that, as drama, the show received almost

universally bad reviews in both the U.K. and the U.S.A.. Certainly it has a popular appeal as I shall point out in the last chapter, but lacking any real characters it fails completely in terms of drama.

When the musical utilises archetypes rooted in its traditional past, it is capable of preserving the balance between function and psychological realism. In the last thirty years, shows have utilised the types identified by Engel and Mordden, finding ways to draw them in line with their own particular ideology.

Engel concurs with the importance of archetypes, or prototypes as he calls them:

"Perhaps the most important reason that the libretti of the best musicals work is their use of prototypes. In selecting characters who are... recognisable, the method of particularisation is at work. In other words, a large, simple point of view is set in motion and expressed by means of characters who are representative of many."⁴

Such an understanding of archetypal usage allows for the revelation of the universal through the specific, and promotes empathy between the audience and the character. The most successful musical theatre works of the period of this study have understood this principle of character.

Character archetypes and their use.

i) The Hero

Clearly the 'hero' figure is related to a conception of the musical theatre as a 'heroic' theatre, though the identification of a 'hero' is one that pertains to many forms of literature. One dictionary puts it as follows: "the chief man in a poem, play or story", and in that broad sense the concept of the hero has been utilised as part of literary criticism for centuries, yet the same dictionary defines 'heroic' as, "High-flown language". We have already seen how the musical creates its own 'high-flown language' through the employment of song and dance. Likewise, the concept of the hero in the musical developed in the Romantic vein, being the 'chief man' in the never-never land of the musical's creation, and displaying those qualities of the hero - 'bold, courageous, illustrious'.

The operettas of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century are rooted in this concept of the hero and his exploits which lead to a happy ending. The hero invariably has a romantic involvement which is resolved happily, and the inherent goodness of the hero's morality is rewarded. Such a tradition extends through the Rodgers and Hammerstein canon, though one can detect the first signs of the tempering of

Romanticism by a new pragmatism rooted firmly in the real world rather than in the never-never land of princes and dragons. Where previously the Red Shadow stirred his followers with a rousing call to arms and serenaded the girl with a big ballad, (in THE DESERT SONG), SOUTH PACIFIC has young Lieutenant Cable viewing the call-to-arms as a situation where, "you've got to be taught to hate and fear", while the King of Siam views life not as an adventure but as 'A Puzzlement'. As the musical developed its social conscience, so the treatment of the hero developed and although Tony in WEST SIDE STORY is in many respects a traditional Romantic Hero, his values are significantly different from those of the Red Shadow! So in the last thirty years the musical has found ways to use the traditional concept of the hero to its own ends.

As Hustoles' generic definitions indicate, the tone of the hero's expression through song and dance will be coloured by the dramatic emphasis of the show's basic concept. In the case of comedy, the hero is not likely to be the dashing figure of old romance, but nonetheless will be a figure whose moral values are rewarded. HOW TO SUCCEED IN BUSINESS WITHOUT REALLY TRYING has an unexceptional hero facing the infernal machine of corporate hierarchy. Yet in spite of his ordinariness,

he is able to make the most of the opportunities that are presented to him and rise to the top. We, the audience, are happy for him and for the sense that we too can achieve happiness.

The traditional romantic hero does appear in recent shows, of course, for we can readily identify him in CAMELOT's King Arthur, yet the context in which he is placed is a far darker one than the fantasy kingdoms of operetta. Nevertheless, the specifics of characterisation lead us to a process of identification with the hero figure and the dilemmas he faces. In Lionel Bart's OLIVER! the central hero figure is Oliver himself, a child, and in the ballad, 'Where Is Love?' his central human need is clearly expressed and empathy is at work for the audience. The naivety and youth of Oliver remove the hero from the world of physical forces and distil the central essence of the emotional line by drawing on a lyrical and musical expression of pure sentiment. Undoubtedly, this a Romanticised version of the show's source material in Dickens' novel, though no less affecting for that. However, it is frequently this distillation of emotional essence in the treatment of character, particularly that of the central hero figure, which so often draws criticism. We have already seen how the musical exists not in a world of social realism, but in a world where the distillation of emotion through

song is the ultimate point of valid expression. No matter the context of the hero's situation, and no matter the particular approach to the drawing of the hero, the distillation of his emotional essence is always readily identified in successful shows, usually through a solo number, for it is in this manner that the specifics of the hero character will be conveyed and also his universal significance, as we are drawn to empathise with him. Whatever one thinks of the tone of 'Where Is Love?', the number functions superbly in the drawing of the hero figure, and in allowing us to empathise with him.

It is particularly revealing here to look at those shows where the distillation of essence in the drawing of the hero has been less than successful, for it denotes a failure to adhere to the principles of artistic selection and as such weakens the show concerned. We have already noted how in COMPANY, Sondheim and Furth sought to create Bobby as a kind of amoral hero, three-dimensional and facing the many inner contradictions which are part of human nature. In doing so they failed to fully distil the central emotional essence of Bobby's dilemma for the audience, and though we may watch and understand Bobby, we never feel for him. No wonder there was difficulty in finding an

appropriate final number. Likewise in FOLLIES, both in its original version and in the revised London version, the four central figures (there is no central hero) face problems of their own making, and although we may recognise their dilemmas, we are never drawn in sufficiently to really care about the people we see and hear, but are more likely to view them as self-indulgent pains-in-the-neck! Sondheim tries to distil the emotional essence of their dilemmas in the final Follies sequence, but in effect this is far too late in the show to draw us into being interested in the characters. Any real sense of the hero is absent here in a world that is uncertain and destabilised.

In THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA, there is confusion over the drawing of the Phantom in that we are asked to respond at times through empathy and at others, with revulsion to a seemingly cruel character. The acts of violence which the Phantom perpetrates are not sufficiently justified in the drawing of character and the process of empathy for us to accept them as necessary, and the show ultimately fails to make up its mind whether it wants us to love or hate the 'hero'. His revenge is upon a world that rejects him for his disfigurement, yet his main emotional drive seems to be to create 'The Music Of The Night' in the subterranean world where he is happy to exist. Thus, his acts of

revenge seem to be motivated purely out of spite for there is never any attempt at a re-socialisation process, merely a selfish desire to set up an idealised, private world outside society. When the Phantom finally disappears at the end, we do not really care, even though it is the somewhat ridiculed world of the opera which is re-stabilised as a result. The authors have sensed in the story, and in the phantom himself, a potential anti-hero, whose values are set clearly against a world of prejudice, yet in their contradictory drawing of the anti-hero, as well as in the triumph of the world of prejudice in the final scene, the creators of PHANTOM fail to make us fully empathise with their central character.

Far more successful in its creation of an anti-hero in this vein is Sondheim and Wheeler's SWEENEY TODD. whose 'Epiphany', while theatrically terrifying, is also deeply felt by the audience since we have been made to feel the terrible injustices heaped on Sweeney by a corrupt social order. Sweeney's slashings, though monstrous, are a deeply felt attempt to re-stabilise social values, if ultimately futile and leading to his own realisation of the havoc he has wrought. In its successful creation of an anti-hero, Sweeney comes as close to true tragedy as the modern musical theatre has

come, where the potential for tragedy in the story of the Phantom is undercut by the contradictory elements in the drawing of character. Though THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA may thrill theatrically in terms of display, its line of credibility in drawing its anti-hero is deeply flawed and ultimately fails to move us.

In comic terms the use of the Romantic hero figure has been successfully utilised in shows whose major stylistic device is that of pastiche. THE GREAT AMERICAN BACKSTAGE MUSICAL revels in the incredibility of the old-style romances, yet never undercuts the true feelings of its hero, Johnny Brash, and his dreams, even as it gently lampoons the convention of the romantic hero. Similarly, ON THE TWENTIETH CENTURY is an attempt to use the conventions of operetta, but adds to it a hero who is not young and dashing but whose ability to survive and win the girl rests on his wit and game-playing instincts. Much of the musical material for Oscar Jaffe is rooted in the styles of the operetta hero, including 'I Rise Again', a stirring anthem of survival, and the love-duet, 'Our Private World'. Here, the never-never land is that of the legendary express train, The Twentieth Century, and for the duration of the cross-continent journey, it is Oscar's kingdom of hopes, fears, dreams and desires.

In ANYONE CAN WHISTLE, the world is one riddled with fraud and madness, where Order and Repression rule. The hero, Hapgood, realises that he exists in a world where 'Everybody Says Don't', whereas he says, 'Do!' In this one number we are made to empathise with Hapgood, not least because the musical shape of the 'Don't' phrases is battering and repetitive, whereas the 'Do' idea is longer and more lyrical. In such ways, the crafting of song can instantly create empathy even when the character's initial values seem to go against our expectations. THE ROCKY HORROR SHOW, whose hero is the androgynous Frank N. Furter, seems a million miles away from the traditional employment of a hero, yet his music contains both energy and softness that suggests a vibrant and vital life-force, and by the end we are part of Frank's kingdom, sorry to see it challenged, even though its values are significantly different from those we have brought into the theatre.

Thus, the context of the hero clearly influences the drawing of the specifics of character, yet in one sense successful heroes are also universal figures. In shows where there is greater emphasis upon ensemble work or where consistency of characterisation is not employed, there is still an implicit hero. In A CHORUS LINE, it is 'Every-dancer', and in STARTING HERE, STARTING NOW it is 'Every-song-and-dance-man'. In both

cases the musical theatre language creates a world of its own and the metaphor of the performer is used as subtext for the process of empathy.

More ambitious still in its approach to the use of a hero figure is HAIR, which, although containing an ostensible hero character, more fully utilises the notion of hero in the implicit figure of Rebellious Youth, while PACIFIC OVERTURES makes Japan the implicit hero of its story. Both shows strive hard to make these implicit heroes function fully, yet it may well be argued that removed from the specifics of character, and the process of particularisation, they are not real heroes at all, for it is difficult to empathise with an abstract concept, such as 'regeneration', or 'nationhood'. Fundamentally, it is the process of empathy which is crucial to the successful employment of hero (or anti-hero) figures in the musical theatre, for therein lies the fundamental tension between character and audience. Without it we may be entertained, but it is unlikely that we will be moved. And in the musical's world of feeling, the distillation of the emotional essence of character, made specific through context and means of expression, is crucial to the success of the show.

ii) The Heroine.

In a similar way, the creation of empathy is crucial to the effective drawing of the heroine figure. In some shows the central protagonist may be female, and in that sense might be considered the 'hero' of the piece. The more traditional heroine of romantic operetta, however, only achieves status in her dependence upon the male hero for her sense of fulfilment.

Again in the Rodgers and Hammerstein shows we can see the beginnings of a move away from the traditional model towards a more independently spirited heroine. Nellie Forbush in SOUTH PACIFIC attempts to 'Wash That Man Right Out Of My Hair', yet still the fulfilment of her place in the show is in the final reuniting of Nellie and Emile de Becque.

In THE SOUND OF MUSIC, CAMELOT, SHE LOVES ME and many more shows of this period, the treatment of the heroine has been in the traditional vein. Where variations in the drawing of the hero have all been related to a variation in the shifting values of the character in a specified social context, the variations in the drawing of the heroine have been in relation to her shifting value to the hero's fulfilment.

WEST SIDE STORY presents a clear picture of just such treatment. Maria's fulfilment rests upon the implicit consummation of her relationship with Tony, even at the expense of family bonds. In OLIVER, where Nancy tries to assert her personal moral values over those of her lover (though he is clearly not the hero figure), she pays for it with her life, a high price for the attainment of Oliver's happiness.

A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE FORUM presents us with both a hero and heroine who are drawn in the traditional mould, but who fail to live up to the audience's expectations of their behaviour, thus mining a rich vein of comedy. Nevertheless, in the end they are united.

But just as the drawing of the hero has developed in line with changing social values (and hence the ideas in the musical's Book), so the heroine could not play the traditional role forever in a world where women have been striving for independent and equal status with men. When Rose in GYPSY sings:

"Someone tell me when is it my turn?
Don't I get a dream for myself?"

she could almost be singing for all musical theatre heroines up to that point. Indeed, Rose is possibly the first musical theatre heroine who rejects her prince

(Herbie) in favour of a personal dream, though admittedly it is still in the role of mother. Nevertheless, the traditional idea of the dependent heroine has certainly shifted a long way since then, and one can trace a line of new Independent Women in the central role of several modern musicals.

Jerry Herman's HELLO DOLLY and MAME both have women as the central protagonist, and though they both find happiness in a relationship it is on their own terms, not those of the hero. Likewise, for Fanny Brice in FUNNY GIRL, her main point of stability lies in her self-belief that she is 'The Greatest Star', and though she experiences pain and happiness in her relationships, she retains her independence.

Kander and Ebb in THE ACT and WOMAN OF THE YEAR mine this vein of independence for their heroine, while EVITA is probably the hardest-edged of all the Independent Women, playing for wealth, power and glory on her terms, and using Peron as a pawn in her game.

In SWEENEY TODD, a remarkable inversion has taken place. Mrs. Lovett is driven to try and fulfil Sweeney's desires on his terms, and is rewarded by being flung into her own oven by the very man she is trying to please. In DREAMGIRLS too, where Effie refuses to be

rejected by the man she loves, she is nevertheless left alone and finally comes to a more mature understanding of her own inner strength and her close relationships.

In expressive terms there is great contrast too between the gentle ballads and charm songs of the traditional heroines, such as 'I Feel Pretty' in WEST SIDE STORY, and the driving rhythmic energies of Rose's 'Some People' say, or Fanny Brice's 'Don't Rain On My Parade'. Such dynamics clearly distil the emotional essences of the central female figures in these shows, and when we feel the sense of the Independent Woman in the music and lyric of a song, we are drawn to her in a sense of empathy and support.

The influence of the Independent Woman on the central relationships in musicals has brought about a greater equality, no longer treating the heroine as an extension of the hero's values and dreams. In ON THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, even as the operetta parallels suggest a dependent woman, especially since Lily Garland's career was created by the all-powerful producer Oscar Jaffee, we discover that Lily is perfectly capable of making her own decisions and is more than a match for her mentor's wit and games. Their reuniting at the end is very equal and suggests that the game will go on beyond the life of the show's story.

When the treatment of the main hero/heroine figures is more sophisticated, then frequently another, younger pair is used to fulfil the more traditional roles of romantic hero and heroine, though they are no longer the central protagonists of the show. Hustoles' generic definitions frequently refer to a romantically involved couple in a supporting rôle, and one can find examples in almost every show of the period. Given recourse to traditional rôles of romantic hero and heroine, the musical dramatists of the period have been singularly unsuccessful in their treatment of these characters. Even the ground-breaking SWEENEY TODD falls back on two-dimensional, functional stereotypes in Antony and Joanna, while HELLO DOLLY's Barnaby/Cornelius /Minnie/Irene quartet merely doubles the crime. In STARLIGHT EXPRESS, all the female rôles are those of train carriages, totally subjugate to the macho world of male trains. This is unimaginative use of traditional models at its worst, and for all the attempts at particularisation (Belle, the sleeping car, Dinah, the dining car, etc.), the rôles lack any real characterisation and we never care for any of them. /

Where specific sexual rôle-models have been undercut by the values of the created world - in shows like THE ROCKY HORROR SHOW, LA CAGE AUX FOLLES, and MARCH OF THE FALSETTOS - it is nevertheless still

possible to identify rôle types. Jerry Herman's Independent Woman becomes the Drag-Queen Zsa-Zsa in LA CAGE AUX FOLLES, while in MARCH OF THE FALSETTOS, Marvin's boyfriend Whizzer is:

"supposed to make the dinner,
be a patsy, look to screw;
That's what pretty boys should do -
Be a patsy, make the dinner and love you!"

This is merely the traditional heroine in male guise. Of course, he refuses to accept the rôle, and Marvin who spends the entire show striving to be the model hero is left alone with no wife, no analyst, no boyfriend and only the hope of a new relationship with his son. Frank N Furter in THE ROCKY HORROR SHOW is a radical amalgam of anti-hero and Independent Woman, while in PACIFIC OVERTURES, Japan makes the transition from traditional heroine to Independent Woman, even though the final illusion of independence is a fallacy. In reality having fallen victim to colonisation, one might consider that Japan has made the transition in reverse, finally falling prey to the wish-fulfilment of America as hero.

Reading the use of rôle-models in such a way displays the breadth of application of character-types, either in the use or the breach thereof, though clearly here one can only touch on the subject. The use of character types is fundamentally linked with the social

values out of which a show is born, and which the Artist had fashioned into the ideas of the Book. Further study of the relationship between the changing rôle of women in society and the development of new female character types in the musical theatre as part of popular culture would prove very valuable, though for the purposes of this study it is sufficient to note the broad trend.

iii) The Villain.

In just the same way as the heroine is traditionally dependent on the hero, so the villain as a figure functions as a personification of the forces which stand in the way of the hero's fulfilment. In relation to nineteenth century melodrama, both hero and villain were drawn in very clear cut terms, and the romantic operettas of the early twentieth century drew on this pattern. However, as all art in the twentieth century came to a growing awareness of the importance of psychology and complexity of human nature, so the musical in its development has ousted the traditional villain as a separate individual character, and replaced it with either the villainy of social structure which impedes the individual, or an inner villainy borne of mankind's inherent contradictions. While OKLAHOMA's Judd Fry may still in part be the traditional villain, WEST SIDE STORY's villain is an attitude - that of

racial prejudice and intolerance. While it is nigh impossible to empathise with a attitude as hero-figure, it is a sign of greater maturity in character-drawing that the greatest villains of all are not individuals in toto, but merely an aspect of their psyche, either inherent or conditioned by their social context.

In CABARET for example, the villain is Fascism, expressed most clearly in the character of Ernst, though he is not directly culpable. Similarly with Rolf, Liesl's boyfriend in THE SOUND OF MUSIC. In both cases the individual characters are given moments of softness when we are allowed to empathise with them, only later becoming functionaries for the larger and darker forces which are the real villain of the respective shows.

In both COMPANY and FOLLIES, it is human nature which suggests a kind of inner villainy. the central protagonists in these shows (and most of the work in which Sondheim has had a hand) are heroes/heroines and villains all at once; their own worst enemies. While this may get in the way of our empathy with them as hero figures upholding a particular set of values, it nevertheless allows them to be truly human, three-dimensional figures, readily identifiable if not particularly admirable. Interestingly, where these characters are in danger of seeming selfish, Sondheim

and Lapine's INTO THE WOODS has selfishness as the implicit villain, where the hero's journey brings him to an acceptance of his part in the collective responsibility for the order of life as he knows it.

Where there is a more direct melodramatic source for a show, the villain is often still clearly identifiable with a particular character. In SWEENEY TODD, Judge Turpin fulfils this function, with Javerre in LES MISERABLES being in a similar vein. In the first case, the traditional villain in a melodramatic treatment of Sweeney Todd was Sweeney himself, but Wheeler and Sondheim have created Sweeney as anti-hero and as a balance, emphasise Judge Turpin as a corrupt figure. In the second case, much of the complexity of Victor Hugo's characterisation in the novel has been simplified in order to clarify the essential conflict of values in the story. Thus Javerre becomes more of a villain in the musical than in the novel, not least through the lyrical and musical treatment of his character in dark contrast to the soaring spiritual moments given to Jean Vargeon. In the PHANTOM OF THE OPERA however, the Phantom is neither truly hero or villain, nor is the essence of either facet of his nature truly distilled.

One might speculate on the inner villains of any of the shows from this period - in THE ROCKY HORROR SHOW for example, the real threat is the denial of personality cult, perhaps, while in MARCH OF THE FALSETTOES it might be considered the brain (!), whose ability for intellectual analysis also creates neuroses - but again thorough analysis is beyond the scope of this study. Yet the major trend of the most successful shows of this period has been to utilise inner villains or socio-political ones rather than those of individual characters. Where individual villains have been used it has either succeeded in creating comic effect, where the individual or group of individuals is invariably representative of a particular attitude, or failed to convince in human terms where a non-comic effect is desired. The two-dimensional trains of STARLIGHT EXPRESS clearly demonstrate the latter employment.

Perhaps most interesting is the case of CHICAGO, where the identifiable villain is honesty! This is of course in line with the totally ironic tone of the whole show where murderesses become overnight celebrities and live a life of luxury. What is clear is that the utilisation of a villain, either personified or implicit is not only crucial to the dramatic conflicts of the story, but also to the underlying function of the musical as a moral art.

As Hustoles' generic categories show, villainy in comedy is usually ridiculous rather than truly evil, and when personified, the character functions as a blocking character to the central protagonist's fulfilment. In comedy-of-manners, the villain is social attitudes and again is treated with ridicule. In the three kinds of Musical Drama however, the villainy whether internal or external is made understandable and psychologically credible, such that it becomes the linchpin of the dramatic conflict.

iv) The Confidant(e).

Musical Drama is also the aspect of the musical theatre which most frequently uses the convention of a confidant, though the three kinds of Musical Comedy all have examples of its usage too. Essentially the confidant is less relevant to plot or theme than s/he is a device used by the musical dramatist to allow for the revelation of views of the central protagonist.

When the mode is representational, the confidant is most frequently an individual character; when direct presentational conventions are used the audience may become the confidant. Given such a direct contact with the audience the need for a separate character fades.

Just as Romeo and Juliet have their confidants in Friar Laurence and the Nurse, so in WEST SIDE STORY Anita functions as Maria's confidant in 'A Boy Like That', as Maria tells her, "I have a love...", while Tony turns to Doc in his store to help him and to confide in when he's in trouble. In MAME and in OLIVER!, the central protagonists in each case use several confidants at different points in their story. Mame has her 'bosom buddy' Vera, her secretary, Agnes Gooch, and her young nephew, Patrick; Oliver has Dodger, Fagin and Nancy.

In CAMELOT, Arthur has an early confidant in Merlin, but once he has been spirited away, he is symbolised by the sword Excalibur, used as an impersonal channel for soliloquy. Frequently, in order to make soliloquy seem credible, especially when a show is in the representational mode, the musical has created unseen confidants. Dolly Levi talks to her dead husband to check if the matchmaking she is doing is right and acceptable to him. Again, he functions not only as confidant, but also in relation to the moral values of the show. FIDDLER ON THE ROOF is just one, though probably the best example of where the unseen confidant is God. Not only is this a functional device for allowing us to see Tevye's feelings where he would not allow them to be displayed to any of the characters in the show, but also provides the source of much humour

and more than one musical number, the pinnacle of which must be 'If I Were A Rich Man'. God moves in an equally non-mysterious way in GODSPELL, predictably, and in LES MISERABLES. Where characters have more than one confidant, it is usually in line with either the overall instability of their situation as in OLIVER, or their self-will which trusts no one else fully, as in EVITA, where there are several confidants for Eva at different times, but only allowed that function if it serves Eva's self-promotion and advancement.

In SWEENEY TODD's, 'My Friends', Sweeney reveals that his razors are his real confidants as he confides to them, "we'll soon drip rubies... precious rubies..." Throughout the number, Mrs. Lovett, twittering like an anxious bird in the music, tries to get Sweeney's attention and create the intimate position of confidant for herself. Skilfully here, the desire for the role of confidant is portrayed musically as somewhat neurotic, born of insecurity, where Sweeney's vocal line to the razors is sweeping, confident and lyrical.

Real confidants are almost always marked by a stability of character or else are objects, animals or God, and thus not able to answer back directly. In ANNIE, Sandy the dog is the real confidant. As is customary and essential, when Annie talks to Sandy we

learn what she really feels and thinks, as opposed to the different masks of feeling and attitude she adopts for her day to day survival. Human confidants tend to be either higher status than the central protagonist, usually in terms of age and implicitly wisdom, through greater experience, or lower status in terms of class or age, thus giving a perspective which is capable of allowing the protagonist to realise his/her own folly by contrast. In A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC, we have both kinds of confidant at work. Madame Armfeldt is the wise old owl of human relationships born of many recollected 'Liaisons', while Petra, the maid, in 'The Miller's Son' reveals a far more down-to-earth attitude to relationships than any of the protagonists seem to have displayed.

More complex still in its use of the confidant rôle is COMPANY which has five married couples, all of whom serve at some stage as confidant to Bobby and his attitudes, but who also act as antagonists in the whole piece. Though it is not unusual for the rôle of confidant to function also as antagonist at some point in the story, it is highly unusual to find ten of them! Such a multiplicity of rôle functions and types is one of the reasons why we sense Bobby's feeling of being marooned in an emotional quagmire, not sure where to

turn for help. In addition his relationship to each of them is not on his terms, hence we rarely get to find out what Bobby truly feels. This is another reason why Bobby as protagonist is indistinct and somewhat colourless. Confidants are best used to help define the central protagonist.

A CHORUS LINE brings a novel twist to the confidant rôle by making all its auditionees use the director as confidant, though through necessity rather than choice. This allows us to empathise with each of the characters in turn as they tell their story, most movingly when Paul is left alone on stage talking to the unseen director at the back of the auditorium. In addition the auditionees talk to each other as confidants to reveal their attitude to the director and the audition in general, born of a common bond existing between all dancers.

In the end, trust is the crucial factor for identifying the rôle of confidant, whether personal or inanimate. SUNDAY IN THE PARK WITH GEORGE has both the older and younger Georges finding the greatest trust in themselves in their art. When that is doubted, Dot is on hand to reassert it. In Act one, she is skilfully utilised as antagonist, sharpening George One's belief in his work, whereas in Act Two, as a spirit from the

past, she is on hand as confidant to the younger George, acting as reassurance at a point of crisis in his personal belief. Though there is no clear single confidant in the show, it is a sophisticated understanding of the function which the confidant plays which allows us more clearly to understand the protagonist and to empathise with him.

Other Considerations.

Naturally, the variations of treatment of these particular archetypes of rôle function are as varied as the range of situations in which they are utilised. Yet, in the acknowledgement of their use lies the fundamental set of interactions and tensions which are at the heart of all drama, that of character in action. As the range of ideas and themes expressed in the musical theatre has expanded, so the treatment of these functional archetypes has been realised in new and interesting ways, but when the dramatists have failed to understand fully the functioning of archetypes of character the vital process of empathy in the musical's world of feeling has not been realised. Characters then seem bland or indistinct, and no matter how affecting the music or how thrilling the spectacle there is no real drama.

Anyone with even a cursory knowledge of the mask and its place in the history of theatre will appreciate that there are other archetypes of character rooted in identifiable socio-economic groupings or related to social institutions and values which may be utilised by the musical theatre according to their suitability for the themes or story expressed, yet the functional archetypes outlined above are recognisable standard features of all successful musicals, regardless of the specific treatment they are given.

Developing characters and their interactions in line with functional archetypes does not necessarily lead to predictable characterisation, though all too often this has been the case, STARLIGHT EXPRESS being an obvious offender here. The specific visual and aural imagery of each character's expression gives three-dimensional credibility to functional archetypes, yet it is in the use of archetypes that the basis of dramatic structure lies.

We have already seen how the purely theatrical function of the Star, the Dance Team, the Chorus and so on are conventions which can be harnessed to the shaping of a show's material in performance, but they too, along with the functional archetypes of the drama's inner life are vital ingredients in the shaping of character and

environment which produce dramatic structure, tension, balance, contrast and rhythm.

Dramatic Structures - A Rhythmic Skeleton.

Hustoles' generic categories identify features of structure and plotting which we associate with specific types of musical theatre: that is, whether a show has a happy ending, whether it includes romantic relationships, whether there are obstacles to the main thrust of the plot, whether the plot is defined by conflict, and whether the plot is simple or complex. Significantly, he also identifies the tone of the treatment of plot and the prevailing situation or context in which the plot is worked out. Yet, for the creative artist, such identifiable features are the end result of the structuring process. A musical dramatist discovers structure as it best suits the ideas being expressed. Clearly if the conception is broadly comic or broadly dramatic, then certain conventions of structuring may be utilised, but at its purest structure evolves from the basis of character in context.

Thus the significance of Hustoles' identification of situation and tone of generic types, for in deciding upon the basic situation in which to place the central characters, the musical dramatist sows the seed of dramatic structure.

Structure might be best described as the shaping of the dramatic whole by the juxtaposition of individual moments or units creating the concept of a dramatic rhythm or shape. Finding the most appropriate situation for the central characters and establishing it at the start of the show is possibly the most crucial aspect of all dramatic structuring. If, for example, Tevye had not been placed in the Russian village of Anatevka with all its values and politics, then there would have been no conflict with the Russian authorities or with the deeply grained values of the Jewish culture. Likewise, in *A CHORUS LINE*, a group of dancers talking in a coffee bar would not have the same inherent pressures as that of the audition which forms the basis of the show. The fact that the dancers, "need this job... need this show", creates the necessity for them all to expose their inner selves in a way that the hypothetical coffee bar would not.

Apart from the opening, the musical dramatist must identify the crucial individual units of action which will make up the key moments of the drama. Aaron Frankel, in Writing the Broadway Musical,⁵ emphasises this approach to structuring. Place a character in context, he suggests, and subsequent key moments will be apparent, contingent upon the character's reaction to

the world and other characters with which s/he is placed. For example, Tony's attraction to Maria in WEST SIDE STORY, immediately suggests a moment of conflict with the rest of the Jets, as well as the necessity of a secret meeting with Maria, since it would be extremely difficult for them to meet properly in a social situation. Both scenes occur shortly after in the musical.

Traditionally, dramatic units have been identified as Scenes, and larger structures as Acts. Yet in the musical, we have seen how song and dance become the prime expressions of the key moments of emotion, and thus, musico-dramatic units might be identified as songs, dances and musical scenes in addition to the purely dramatic units of Scene and Act, with song functioning as scene and musical procedures of unification creating the equivalent of Act structures. Thus, by identifying the units of the dramatic seed and employing musico-dramatic conventions in alliance with the dramatic line, the musical dramatist begins to build a shape for the show - a kind of rhythmic planning crucial to the process of synthesis.

The drama will have inherent contrasts, and by developing these into a pattern of shifting locales (either real or imaginary), and shifting character emphasis, the shape of the show begins to emerge.

In HELLO DOLLY, for example, the setting shifts from Yonkers, via the train station to New York, where Irene's hat shop, the streets, the Harmonia Gardens restaurant, both inside and out, in order to open up the spirit of the show, creating a suitable environment, often public, where not only is the use of chorus credible, but where its use also effects an enlargement of the emotional essence of the moment. In A CHORUS LINE where the actual locale remains the same throughout, the rhythmic potential of shifting locales is created by flashbacks to moments in the past lives of the characters, 'At The Ballet', drama school, at home with parents, and so on. Variation of setting is crucial to the sustaining of interest and dramatic tension for the audience.

Similarly with character emphasis, the musical dramatist will focus upon first one character, then another, according to their importance to the central theme or story. As expressed through song and dance this leads to the principles of musical programming. What is crucial in variations of setting and character emphasis is the necessity to establish a rhythmic line for performance predicated upon visual and aural contrasts. In this contrast lies the theatrical alliance between the two aesthetic polarities.

Frankel⁶ outlines a process for converting the conceptions of character and setting into aural and visual expression, thus ensuring the suitability of expression, in line with our critical concept of appropriateness of artistic selection. Hustoles, of course, recognises the end product of this process in his identification of the different uses of song and dance to serve specific sub-generic functions. In outlining this rhythmic structure, of course, the process is not dissimilar to that followed by any dramatist, yet in its emphasis upon song and dance certain conditions follow which make the musical significantly different in structuring from the non-musical play.

Firstly, all moments of major dramatic importance are given over to song or dance. Thus the librettist must sacrifice any desire to dramatise in words alone and hand over the key moments of the drama to the composer and lyricist or composer and choreographer. For this reason alone the musical is a form rarely tackled by leading playwrights.

In addition, the length of time required to express through music is longer than that of the spoken word, and therefore the musical dramatist must compress the action into its most essential form, making its most

important points succinctly. In printed editions it is interesting to compare the length of source materials, especially plays, with their musical adaptations.

LILIOM, for example, runs to 132 pages as a play, yet its musicalisation, CAROUSEL has a libretto of only 88 pages. Of course, this is also partly because music is capable of creating a scene and/or atmosphere very quickly, and generally much more quickly than it would take to establish in words. As such, a single short song can say as much as a whole scene in a play.

The idea of song as scene must be related to the need of the character or characters involved. In order that it function dramatically the character must be trying to resolve something, or is reacting to a previous moment and pondering what to do next. In this way a song or dance serves the dramatic line and doesn't interrupt it, regardless of its stylistic dynamic. Reflective solo ballads and bustling choral rhythmic numbers can serve this function equally well.

The identification of these dramatic units of song and dance and spoken dialogue is only the beginning however, a kind of rhythmic skeleton. What affects the impression of a theatrical unity is the developed style as already discussed in Chapter Five and the method of transition from one unit to the next. Frequently this

also means the transition from one expressive mode to another. This is perhaps the hardest job of the musical dramatist, one which is not open to any specific principles other than that of instinct. Clearly the musical dramatist must be aware of both aesthetic considerations in planning these rhythmic 'gear shifts', but the crucial factor is for the dramatist to retain the concept of necessity of expression for the character. Dialogue, situation, context must be sufficiently pressured for the character in emotional terms so that there is a need to move to the heightened expressive plane of song or dance. If the need is not sufficient, the transition to song or dance will seem at least a device and at worst unintentionally comic. In spite of the presentational nature of song and dance, the musical dramatist should not succumb to the use of presentational effect for its own sake: though almost all shows do! A good tune, a dynamic dance routine, a spectacular scenic effect are often too good to resist even when the moment doesn't demand it. This is undoubtedly the greatest single trap for the musical dramatist. The conscientious writer will rigorously adhere to the principles of dramatic function of song and dance. The authors of A CHORUS LINE acknowledge that the ballad, 'What I Did For Love' was included as much because they believed the audience wanted at least

one 'good' tune. In performance, though the ballad itself is telling enough, the transition into it is clumsy and contrived. Likewise, the first twenty minutes of MISS SAIGON are full of rather soupy ballads and duets for Miss Saigon and Chris, striving to demonstrate their emotional attraction to each other; yet the moment of their first meeting is so implausible and badly handled that the audience do not feel the real human need for this expression. Empathy is not present and so the ballads become demonstration: we are in effect told about their attraction through these ballads rather than seeing it happen and believing in it sufficiently to feel with them.

One of the significant factors in the linking of units is the need to sustain dramatic tension and this is highlighted by the compression of idea into the basis of the libretto. A second useful key for the musical dramatist is in an understanding of the treatment of time in relation to dramatic sequence. Lehman Engel pin-points this factor by noting that:

"in the plays of Shakespeare, the action is almost always continuous. On those few occasions when time has lapsed between scenes and acts, its passage is made clear in the dialogue that follows; and generally the lapse has been so well prepared in the previous scene that the audience knows at once what the interval is. Writing in this way is of course most dramatic, since the audience is propelled ahead at the end of every scene and the action is seldom interrupted."⁷

The musical theatre has most frequently used this approach to time to help sustain dramatic tension by emphasising the necessity of expression and the urgency for the character. Happily this sense of urgency allows for the sustaining of tension through the lengthened expression of song, where the same moment expressed in words over the same period of actual time would seem overwritten and slacken the line of tension.

WEST SIDE STORY's scenes follow precipitously one upon the other, and GYPSY's time lapses are indicated through ingenious vaudevillian travelling sequences. At its most abstract of course where the musical employs a metatheatrical level, dramatic time is in direct accord with theatrical time. In A CHORUS LINE the dramatic time of the show is exactly the same as the time we spend in the theatre. Andrew Lloyd Webber's work has frequently made use of the framing time device, beginning at the end of the story and framing the entire dramatic life of the show in a kind of flashback. EVITA begins with Eva's death and funeral. THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA opens with an auction of memorabilia from the days when the Phantom stalked the Paris Opera House, and, at its least subtle perhaps, ASPECTS OF LOVE opens with Alex musing that, 'Love Changes Everything', while Giulietta reminds him that, "it's all in the past."

One of the major problems with CANDIDE in either of its musical incarnations is that the time span of the piece is ill-defined and sprawling. This is partly due to the fact that the source material is philosophically based rather than in terms of narrative tension. In fact, narrative tension is deliberately ignored in its usual logical sense, and thus the time factor is negated. The musical's failure to find a suitable alternative to this treatment of time is one of its major dramatic and theatrical weaknesses. Similarly, PACIFIC OVERTURES is faced with a large time span in its conception though it finds two different ways of dealing with time span in musical numbers. In 'Please Hello' the process of the cultural invasion of Japan from Europe is condensed into a series of approaching Admirals who enter through the audience and arrive at the stage one on top of the other until by the end of the number they are all competing for the attention of the Japanese at once. More successfully still, the introduction of Western material goods, and implicitly of Western values, to Japan over a historical period of several generations span, is condensed into the number, 'A Bowler Hat'. The sudden and surprising shift to modern times in the final number 'Next' is a particularly bold approach to the treatment of time in the musical theatre. Nevertheless it works as much

because it knows it is flouting the fundamental principle of the treatment of time in the musical.

Usually though, significant time lapses in the musical take place between Acts, rather than during them. Decisions over Act Structure are also a vital tool of the musical dramatist, although most rely on the Two Act convention, possibly without thought as to the alternatives. *ANYONE CAN WHISTLE*, on the other hand, not only had bold thematic material, but structures itself in three Acts rather than the conventional two. In its way, the Act structure aided the thematic idea by subverting audience expectation and placing them in a world of madness and manipulation, where traditional order is subverted. This is exactly the root of the story. *A CHORUS LINE* on the other hand, utilising the metatheatrical idea of an audition, reflects the intense pressure of the situation by playing its entire two hours plus length without intermission. Thus, the audience is made to experience the almost relentless pressure of the director, Zach, upon the auditionees. This is a potentially dangerous structuring with a show of such length, yet the show rises to the challenge with its shifting emphases and dynamics, and sustains tension and interest throughout. When harnessed to the dramatic seed, the placing of Acts is a valuable addition to means of dramatic structuring for the musical dramatist.

Longer Lines.

When the rhythmic skeleton has been established with due consideration given to the dramatic functions of song and dance, and the broader concepts of compression and time applied to it, one can view a single shape in the outline of a show. In directing a musical, it is vital to identify the total shape of the show as written in order to make decisions about focusing, highlighting of moments, underplaying others and so on. Personally, I have always found it useful to visualise the longer rhythmic line of a show as if it were a kind of graph.

Broadly speaking, there are two contrasting and distinct shapes identifiable in musical theatre structuring. The first might be described as masculine, the other as feminine. Masculine structures are essentially those whose broadest line is one of a single ascension to a climax near the end, followed by a brief relaxation in the resolution. Feminine structures are those which are predominantly cyclic, with several climaxes, or a single climax which comes around the centre of the work. Such concepts of masculine and feminine structure are not exclusive to the musical of course, but have become part of the critical vocabulary of all kinds of art. When applied to the musical

theatre though, they might be more specifically labelled as narrative or notional treatments of basic material.

Narrative shows are by far the most predominant, resting as they do upon story, character in action. In narrative treatments events and actions are contingent, one upon the other. Narrative is directly in line with the concept of myth, which we identified as a crucial source for musical theatre's heightened expression and its Romantic predilection. In addition it marries happily with the concept of the dramatic function of song and dance, where characters advance from point A to point B in the course of singing or dancing. Even when time is treated non-sequentially in dramatic terms, the contingency of events in narrative structure is important. In MISS SAIGON, the crucial event of the narrative - the Americans final departure from Saigon - is taken out of sequence in terms of the presentation in theatrical terms. Presented as a flashback nightmare, it occurs in the centre of Act Two, three quarters of the way through the show, thus providing a theatrical climax to the piece, yet all the events of the show are contingent upon that action, even the ones we have already seen. It is skilful manipulation of Time in relation to narrative which provides a satisfying theatrical structure out of a direct narrative. In sequential terms the event would happen in Act One, yet

its removal emphasises the event as the thematic emblem of the show's ideology.

Most shows however, treat narrative in directly sequential terms. Any number of shows serve as examples of this, though WEST SIDE STORY is as fine an example as any, not least due to its compression of time. Virtually all shows prior to the period of this study were rooted in narrative treatment.

Notional treatment, on the other hand, may well have found its way into the musical theatre vocabulary through the influence of experiments with form and image in the non-musical theatre. Modernism of thought had led to modernism of form. Just as Absurdism, for example, became identified as a formal and stylistic expression of a central philosophical core, so the musical has begun to explore structural and stylistic expression based upon themes, ideas, notions - in short, non-narrative sources - which demand a different treatment. In notional shows, events are non-contingent and movement from one moment to the next may be lateral. In such treatments, the necessity for dynamic based upon contrast, both aural and visual, gains extra emphasis in sustaining a theatrical tension for the audience. In addition there is extra emphasis upon the presentational qualities of song and dance.

It is here that one must dispense with one of the most abused critical terms of recent years associated with the musical theatre; that of the concept musical. The term is an invented critical one, first applied to COMPANY in 1970. Since then it has been applied to many shows, seemingly without reason and certainly without consistency. All critical attempts to define it or apply it, including Nicholas Rinaldi's Music As Mediator: A Description Of The Process Of Concept Development In The Musical CABARET,⁸ and Dan Cartmell's Stephen Sondheim And The Concept Musical,⁹ centre upon the use of a presentational 'Concept' in the creation of a show, rooted in the Book. This is meaningless, as all shows have a presentational concept, even if it is representational. What they are trying to identify is the added emphasis on presentational values when narrative tension is not the central means of sustaining audience interest. A CHORUS LINE has often been described as a concept musical, yet in reality it is a deceptively simple narrative. The story of the audition is clearly played out in front of us, interwoven with the individual narratives of the characters who are auditioning. Through highly skilled use of song and dance, the rhythmic contrasts created by shifting character and setting emphasis make for an original and consistently changing treatment of narrative; yet

narrative it is, in spite of the additional level of complexity in its metatheatrical function. Likewise CHICAGO has an over-riding presentational concept of vaudeville, again utilising a metatheatrical level, yet it still presents us with a sequentially treated narrative. PACIFIC OVERTURES on the other hand similarly uses a presentational concept in its Oriental theatre style, but is a notional musical. Its heart is the expression of the developing relationship and meeting of cultures of America and Japan. At root, it is abstract thought that is being converted into musical theatre. Characters are created, certainly, but there is no narrative tension rooted in character to sustain our interest. Many critics have classed all Stephen Sondheim's work as composer/lyricist as concept musicals, yet it is clear that while some are treated notionally, others, like SWEENEY TODD, are narrative. Evidence of intellectual rigour does not qualify a show as a concept musical, and presentational emphasis, as Hustoles recognises, varies according to the generic roots of each show. If a concept of presentation is the qualifying factor, then the term is redundant, for all musicals - indeed, all theatre - utilises a concept of presentation. Almost all true notional shows fall into Hustoles' categories of Musical Romance and Musical Revue, in the latter because there tends to be no

consistency of characterisation on which to build narrative, and in the former because a show rooted in an abstract concept of thought is in alliance with Romanticism's intellectual idealism. Sondheim himself refers to SUNDAY IN THE PARK WITH GEORGE as a notional musical,¹⁰ rooted in a consideration of the artist and his position within society as reflective of the artistic process as a whole. Admittedly, it uses a narrative strand, most notably in Act One where the relationship between George and Dot has a contingency in its development, but it is there primarily as emblematic expression of the tension between an artist's independence and focus in his work, and the demands of inter-personal relationships. Dot sees the two as conflicting; George though, "cannot divide (his) feelings as easily" as Dot, but sees the two as one source of his art.

Similarly, Sondheim's other show with Lapine, INTO THE WOODS, uses narrative - five separate ones in fact! - eventually weaving them together into a single strand. Narrative tension is certainly a crucial device in sustaining audience interest, yet the show is truly a notional treatment, exploring the concept of collective responsibility and the place of myth.

Notional treatments have interesting implications in terms of Act Structures. Both the above shows have two acts, but move to a significant climax at the end of Act One, so that the audience feels a sense of conclusion. In SUNDAY IN THE PARK WITH GEORGE, George completes his picture and freezes it into a perfect artistic vision. INTO THE WOODS leads to the 'happy ending' resolution of the five fairy tales which make up Act One. In both cases the audience is left wondering what on earth can happen now.. In the former case, Act Two shifts us forward almost a hundred years to a new George; in the latter, the development is not on earth, but descends from the sky via Jack's beanstalk in the shape of the Giant's wife come to seek revenge for her husband's death and to apportion blame. Far from the happy ending traditional fairy tales, the characters' world is destroyed and a further journey through the woods of the soul is necessary to accept the cheating that took place in Act One in order to produce those 'happy endings'.

FOLLIES, too, is a notional musical, and played as a single Act in its first incarnation in 1972, only being revised to two acts for London in 1987. The narrative thread in the show is of the utmost simplicity, with the present meeting of four people at a reunion being interwoven with episodes from their pasts.

The link between these events is a thematic one, the central notion behind the show being the concept of confronting our personal follies - our hopes, fears, dreams and desires - and our success or failure in realising them upon reaching middle-age. Again, there is a presentational emphasis, most especially in the pastiche material, and the many numbers apportioned to minor characters are all reflective of the central theme, yet play no part in the secondary narrative level of the show.

Of course, there have been several shows which do not clearly fall into either category. MARCH OF THE FALSETTOES has a narrative thread, for example, yet its central thought is that of the neuroses of interpersonal relationships and family structures. The reality of the narrative is displaced by conventional devices which highlight thematic idea and allow for the specific to become universal. In a single act, the show tells of Marvin's attempts to create, 'A Tight-Knit Family', out of his relationships with his male lover, Whizzer, his ex-wife, Trina, his psychiatrist, Mendel, and his son, Jason. At one point there is introduced 'Marvin at the psychiatrist - a three-part mini-opera', while Marvin's relationship with Whizzer is treated as a strategic game of chess. The primary sustaining of tension in the show

is thematic rather than narrative, a trait which can be seen even more clearly in the earlier Marvin show, *IN TROUSERS*. Here narrative is almost singularly absent, and in the series of musical scenes, each has a different presentational emphasis, linked by Marvin's crisis over his masculinity in relation to three female figures in his life; his wife, his former girlfriend and his ex-school mistress.

Likewise, *CABARET* treats its material both narratively, employing song and dance as parts of the created 'real' world of Berlin, and notionally, where the numbers in the Kit-Kat club exist as presentationally treated moments of thematic development. In this case the blend between the two treatments is not synthesised as successfully as in *MARCH OF THE FALSETTOS*, and there is a constant sense of duality of intent among the show's creators, a view with which the show's director Hal Prince concurs,¹¹ and an effect which creates confusion for the audience in performance. (In the translation to the film version, song and dance as part of the narrative was completely removed and all the numbers included were in the club, serving as ironic counterpoint to the main story.)

Ultimately, decisions over treatment of material will be predicated by the source material. It is

interesting to note that almost all true notional shows have been original works or ones whose source has not been a traditional literary or dramatic one, while narrative treatments are invariably rooted in a narrative source.

A History Of Adaptation.

For what sometimes seems like inexplicable reasons the musical theatre has been rooted in a history of adaptation. Yet we should not really be surprised at the fact. Firstly, the practice of adapting literary or dramatic material for musical treatment is a time-honoured one, and the story of opera is littered with examples of such adaptation, both good and bad. Secondly, given such a source the musical dramatist already has the bare bones of the musical's skeleton in the form of character and action. Alan Jay Lerner in his preface to *BRIGADOON*¹² suggested the use of already tested material for libretto purposes was a good idea and emphasises that:

"the book is all essential. It is the fountain from which all waters spring. So start off on the right foot and select a story that is all prepared for you. The translation of that story to musical form is quite complex enough. Within that frame you will find more than adequate challenge to your originality and enough on which to experiment."¹³

Engel, in The American Musical Theatre, equally stresses the importance of adaptation both as part of the musical's general history and in the process of exercising craft in structure, and especially he notes:

"a general lack of understanding of the requirements of musical theatre as opposed to those of non-musical plays."¹⁴

This study has already noted the lack of critical distinction between the skills required by the musical theatre and the non-musical theatre. In relation to the artist and the process of adaptation, not to recognise the difference is liable to prove fatal to the show's artistic success. Engel goes on:

"The dramatic form of the musical is necessarily a different one, and one of its aspects - the skeletal quality which allows music and lyrics to assume functional rôles - is not generally known by many of even our best writers."¹⁵

If the situation has changed at all, it has done so not least due to Mr. Engel's series of workshops for musical dramatists in America, (something which to date has yet to happen in Europe). In addition Stephen Sondheim's canon of work has been discussed as much for its approach to craft as for its content and this has begin to increase the awareness, for both critics and artists alike, of the demands of musical theatre.

Certainly, the practice of adapting from other sources is not only stressed by Engel and Lerner, but was also a key factor in the exercises suggested to a young Stephen Sondheim by Oscar Hammerstein II.¹⁶ Of four exercises, three were to be adaptations; one of a play he admired as a good play, one of a play he admired but considered flawed, and one of a short story or novel. In spite of his seeming originality, almost all Sondheim's work, with his various collaborators, has been adaptation of a previous source. Even when this has not been the case, there has certainly been some concrete image which serves as a springboard for the artist's imagination, as in SUNDAY IN THE PARK WITH GEORGE. One might almost say that the musical is adapted from the painting by George Seurat, even though there is no sense of the narrative aspect of more traditional sources.

The process of adaptation for the musical stage is one of transliteration from one medium to another, and thus has several implications on the result other than that of expressive mode.

Firstly, as already outlined, the source must be chosen with a mind to its musicality.

Secondly, though it might appear that the adapter's task of reworking already tested material into a

musical's Book is a relatively easy and straightforward one, he must reorganise the material with an eye and ear for the specific requirements of the musical's expressive voice. The plot must be shaped so as to include song and dance as essential expressions, and the essence of character must be distilled, so that they may be revealed in new and interesting ways. In addition the characters must be portrayed more succinctly. The dramatist may also have to create additional characters or delete others who make insufficient contribution to the new form, inject appropriate comedy material where there is none, and arrange for a suitable act structure, possibly providing one, if not more breaks in the performance.

Again it is Engel who elaborates on the implications for playwrights and songwriters who wish to create a musical.

"The play - now to become a libretto - must be incomplete without music and lyrics. (The playwright) must allow time and space for the musical materials, which cannot repeat what has already been said in dialogue. He must simplify, be more succinct than would otherwise be his custom, eliminate complex intellectual ideas and be willing to surrender to musical and lyrical purposes the peak emotional moments which can be more effectively expressed by these means."¹⁷

Thirdly, and perhaps most crucially, is the factor identified by Arthur Laurents:

"Many people object to musicals on the ground that they are merely the reworking of old and familiar material. The trouble, rather, is that the material is not reworked: it is merely edited and songs dropped in..."¹⁸

Reworking in this instance does not merely refer to the first two imperatives of adaptation outlined above, but also to an ideological reworking, which must be thorough and complete if the new structure of character and plot is to be effective.

If we take two examples of this process of transliteration we can see how clearly the musical has both succeeded and failed in its adherence to these principles.

In the case of WEST SIDE STORY, on which Laurents himself was the librettist, adapting from Shakespeare's ROMEO AND JULIET, the difference between the source and its musical treatment are striking. The new setting immediately suggests a radically different approach to characterisation and to the sense of language. Romeo and Juliet become Tony and Maria, while the Montagues and Capulets translate into the Jets and the Sharks, rival street gangs on New York's West Side. In the world of youth gang warfare, the codes of honour and loyalty, especially when racially rooted are as strong as those of the Veronan families. The Friar becomes Doc

at his store, while the Nurse becomes Anita. In both cases their position and function is significantly different from the original. Many of the central scenes of the source play have corresponding scenes in the musical, others are removed completely while new ones are created. In particular the musical creates the Ensemble musical scene prior to the Rumble at the end of Act One, and the visionary 'Somewhere', the former in order to create an ascending tension and anticipation, the latter to lie in line with the moral purpose of Laurents and his collaborators. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, Anita plays an active function in persuading Tony that Maria is dead, leading to the final scene. Here the major difference between the two occurs in that Maria does not die at the end, but in her anger and grief becomes a catalyst for the possible resolving of differences between the two gangs by making them join together in bearing away Tony's body. The author's purpose in the musical is clear and fulfilled in its expression and is significantly different from that of the play, even though much of the imagery and basis of character and structure stem from the source material.

MISS SAIGON. on the other hand, attempts to translate the story of the opera MADAME BUTTERFLY into the modern context of the Vietnam War. However, the authors make several errors of judgement in their

adaptation which results in a confusion of ideological purpose. In the original opera, the crucial values which affect the actions of the title character are those of honour and Japanese tradition (in the moral sense). Though she is willing to endure the anger of her family and the fact that they disown her, she still believes she can find honour in her relationship with Pinkerton, embodied by the son she bears him. When she finds she has been betrayed by him, the only way she can restore her honour is to commit ritual suicide, a deed accepted as part of the moral ethic in ancient Japanese society. In MISS SAIGON however, the relationship between Chris and the heroine is coloured quite differently. Rather than the honourable position of geisha, she is drawn as an unwilling prostitute, while Chris is not the selfish Pinkerton figure, but a soldier with a conscience who can no longer endure his position in the war. So far this is acceptable as a parallel to the relationship between America and Vietnam which the show attempts to draw. Much of the story line is similar to the original with the introduction of a far more significant pimp figure who acts as a kind of commentator on the moral implications of the story. The show goes badly awry though in Act Two. Chris - and by implication America - is made to be remorseful for leaving behind his child, and so returns to Vietnam in

order to search out his child. When Miss Saigon discovers through Chris's wife what the true situation is, and that they will not take her son to America, she shoots herself so that they will have no choice. Given the parallel that the show attempts to draw between the personal relationships of Miss Saigon and Chris and the America/Vietnam situation, this seems like a foolish act of self-sacrifice, and certainly not one of tragedy, though the music at this point strives for tragic significance. In fact, one might have more reasonably expected Miss Saigon/Vietnam to refuse to be taken over by the Americans/Chris after having once deserted her. As the show stands it allows America off the hook and sanitizes American guilt at its participation in Vietnam; an ideological turnaround in the show which is betrayed as much by the fact that its eleven o'clock number 'The American Dream', while striving for irony, ends up being a theatrical celebration of what it aims to criticise. In fact, Vietnam has survived and developed as a nation, however tenuously, since the American departure, and the audience feel cheated by an ending which follows the line of its source too closely. Such are the dangers of transliteration, and the ideological ground of the musical dramatist must be clearly laid out if the process is to succeed. At best, a musical adaptation will have something new to say.

Originality.

Of course, given that a musical dramatist has something to say, it would seem feasible that the best and truest way to express it would be to create a completely new set of characters and structures. As it is, there have been very few truly successful examples of the completely original musical. This is partly due to the considerations of form and expression which must be mastered and understood before one can begin to conceive purely in terms of a musical theatre language.

There are some, however, which have proved that mastery of these considerations and principles of creation in the musical theatre can lead to an original and powerful expressive voice. The work of William Finn in *IN TROUSERS* and *MARCH OF THE FALSETTOES* is work that is rooted in the essential crafts of the form, and also successfully creates new characters, relationships and situations which are fresh, vital and consistently interesting. Likewise, the work of Stephen Sondheim is a fine example of how mastery can lead to originality. Both *SUNDAY IN THE PARK WITH GEORGE* and *INTO THE WOODS* are stunning examples of the musical theatre as art, complex in intent and ideology, clearly and interestingly drawn both in terms of character and structure, and theatrically engaging.

A show like STARLIGHT EXPRESS on the other hand, fails completely to understand principles of characterisation and structuring so as to create and sustain dramatic tension. What ideology it does contain, whether conscious or otherwise is simplistic, to say the least, and crudely drawn. Thus it has to strive constantly for theatrical effect and thrill in order to have any hope of sustaining audience interest. In researching for this study, one came across time and time again, libretti for shows which had little or no understanding of characterisation and dramatic structuring in the musical theatre's terms, and almost all original musicals are weak in this area.

Perhaps the most interesting and significant of all original musicals of this period was HAIR. Consciously choosing to jettison consistency of characterisation, narrative plot and traditional elements of the musical's presentational style, it was remarkable for its success in engaging its audience. Much of this was, however, due to its ideological background, its appeal to a developing youth culture in the sixties and to the concept of freewheeling artistic expression devoid of rules and critical standards. As such it was the perfect expression of its time, yet its lack of fundamental dramatic tensions make it almost impossible to revive except as a period curio. It is significant

in its challenge to the traditions of the musical's approach to character and structure, and to its history of adaptation, and its failure to replace them with anything of lasting value. As an original show it was startlingly successful, despite certain flaws in its lyrical craft; yet in its very existence may lie the exception that proves the rule. And the rules of converting the ideas of the artist into workable dramatic structures based on character help to provide the blueprint for the living performance. As such they are vital processes for all musical dramatists to practise and are at the heart of all successful shows of the period.

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CHAPTER 8

THE INFERNAL MACHINE - THE WORKINGS OF THE MUSICAL

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Given that the musical dramatist has translated the Book - into a workable dramatic form, the only real test of its success comes in its theatrical realisation. The process of production in the musical theatre is one that often comes under heavy fire for being too machine-like, but when one considers all the elements that have to be taken into account and balanced in order to create a unified whole, it is hardly surprising that the musical theatre should require more discipline than that of its non-musical counterpart. We have already seen how some of the physical requirements for the realisation of musical theatre performance affect the whole process of creation, and how their use has produced certain conventions of performance. In this chapter we shall examine different cogs in the musical theatre machine and see how they contribute to the whole, and how, in particular, during the period of this study, they have affected the range of musical theatre expression.

People or Puppets?

Central to any theatrical performance is the actor, and in the musical this is equally true, though here the actor is in the guise of 'song and dance man'. However,

it would be a mistake to consider the musical theatre performer as merely a singer or a dancer. Equally culpable would be to consider him/her an actor who can sing and dance a bit! Most crucially, just as the dramatist must understand the unique expressive qualities of song and dance in the dramatic context, so the musical theatre performer must be aware of its function and must possess the ability to act through song and dance. All too often one sees performers who are unable to effectively make the transition between one mode and another, or whose ability in one aspect of performing is undercut by their lack of ability in another.

Part of the problem has been in the lack of training opportunities specifically for the musical theatre performer, especially in the U.K. Acting training has always placed some emphasis upon the ability to sing a little and to move with control and a reasonable degree of flexibility, but there has been virtually no specialisation in the musical theatre. Actors are expected to be able to hold their own in a musical, but only those with an instinctive ability in either singing or dancing are likely to go further in the form. On the other hand, those who have specialist technical training as either singers or dancers are

likely to have received no formal training as actors at all. This state of affairs immediately presents all kinds of problems when it comes to casting.

Clearly, an individual performer's personality and talent are given factors in the casting process, but their basic training from a technical point of view will also come into play. Of course, different shows make different demands on their performers. A CHORUS LINE, 42ND STREET, and CATS, for example, are consciously conceived with a strong dance element, particularly demanding in the case of CATS, and therefore dance ability must be high on the list of consideration in casting, together with the vocal demands of the score. In the case of the first two shows, an ability for playing their respective types of comedy will be crucial. WEST SIDE STORY, too, has a strong dance element, but the vocal demands of Tony and Maria, say, are far more significant than their dance ability. All of Stephen Sondheim's work has a strong vocal emphasis in the music: Sweeney Todd is a rôle demanding great stamina, breadth of tone and lyricism, while Mrs. Lovett requires clarity of diction, vocal dexterity and a certain warmth, in order to achieve the right balance of comedy and pathos. Nonetheless, Sondheim would be the first to suggest that the most crucial factor in casting is the ability of the performer as actor. In that light,

the casting of Elaine Stritch in the London production of COMPANY, or Diana Rigg in the London production of FOLLIES makes sense, in spite of their limitations in singing technique. What is crucial is the actor's ability to present the song convincingly as spontaneous expression of character in action.

This idea of the effect of spontaneous expression is in accord with our aesthetic polarity of credibility in performance and is at the heart of any rehearsal process for the musical theatre actor. The other polarity rests very much upon the performer's singing and dancing abilities.

Stephen Pimlott, in casting the Royal National Theatre's production of SUNDAY IN THE PARK WITH GEORGE, identified the problems presented by different training backgrounds,¹ which produce different kinds of performer and voice types. There are those of an old school operetta-based approach to musical theatre performance, those who have had classical voice training, those who are actors and can 'sing a bit', those with a 'Broadway belt', and those of the 'Euro-pop' style whose voice is resonated primarily in the nose and who rely on radio-mics to amplify their sound. The particular demands of the score, and of the rôles of Dot and George in particular, make all these 'types' unsuitable for the

show, and thus the casting possibilities are vastly reduced to those who have the technical flexibility to use their voice and an approach to acting through song to meet the technical demands of the score and to create effective characterisation. In the event, the cast was made up of a range of performers from different backgrounds, and included Matt Zimmerman, a long-standing performer of the West End musical tradition, Maria Friedman, a young singing actress of the musical stage with a dynamic range in her voice that captures the rôle of Dot, an intense singing actor in Philip Quast, an Australian brought to the U.K., to perform in LES MISERABLES, significantly in a rôle whose vocal demands were very different from those of George, and Sheila Ballantine, an actress with some singing experience as a low contralto, who had just finished playing Arsinoe in the National's production of Moliere's THE MISANTHROPE. Such are the problems of casting in the musical theatre when there is no specific training or common vocabulary of technique for musical theatre performers (and directors).

Since acting and the specific techniques of singing and dancing are all labour-intensive and time-consuming in their training, it is little wonder perhaps that there has been no further development towards the

harnessing of the three into one vocabulary for the musical theatre. Yet it must be a crucial future development for the musical theatre if it is to extend its expressive range. Non-musical theatre places great emphasis upon the training of its actors and their part in the rehearsal process, giving them a significant if not pre-eminent place in the creation of the work in performance. Given the lack of training and common vocabulary, coupled with the many non-dramatic elements that are required for the musical theatre to exist at all, the musical theatre actor has very little importance in the overall creative process, and seemingly little control over its effect in performance. For that reason, some have considered the musical theatre performer to be a puppet rather than a person, manipulated by directors, writers, choreographers, designers and producers to serve as a cog in the infernal machine of the musical. A vital cog, undoubtedly, but simply a machine part nonetheless. Any training for the musical theatre must reassert the position of the singing actor as central to the musical stage and establish a common working vocabulary. Talk to any performers in the musical extravaganzas of the current West End and Broadway seasons and they will almost certainly acknowledge their lack of contribution to the creative development of the show, the lack of

concern for their individual creativity in playing the rôle, the rapidly developing sense of stagnation due to that lack of creativity, and their sense of subjugation to considerations other than that of the performer, and his/her work. In this author's work with leading West End performers, it is all too clear that some of our principal performers in the musical theatre have no training as actors at all and what's more are receiving none in the production process. The lack of a working vocabulary is astounding, and would most certainly not be tolerated in the non-musical theatre. Given the fact that there is a huge amount of talent present in the musical theatre, this state of affairs is nothing short of shameful. There is no particular place to lay the blame, yet it is a situation which urgently needs addressing, and proper training must be developed.

Central to this training must be the vital imperatives of acting. Technical training in voice and body (including singing and dancing) are important aspects of the work, but are rooted in the individual's physiognomy and inherent ability. What is vital is that musical performers develop a common vocabulary - a kind of Method! - which makes them conscious of their working processes in bringing to life the material they have to perform. Just as Stanislavsky and others have been drawn towards defining a methodology for non-musical

actors, so one must be able to attempt something similar for the singing actor based on similar principles.

To date there have been only two attempts at this. The first, and rather cursory try is in Fred Silver's book, Auditioning For The Musical Theatre,² though this concentrates as much upon external factors as it does upon an actual approach to the performance. Far more successful is David Craig's excellent approach, On Singing Onstage,³ which tackles the very heart of the matter, and suggests several possible methods the singing actor might use to translate the text (words and music) into a physical performance.

The crucial aspect on which he focuses most attention is the idea of mining the text for the subtext, which gives the physical blueprint for performance. Subtext is as crucial an idea to the dramatist as it is to the performer, and good writing for the musical theatre must weave it into its characterisation and structure. Too often musical dramatists have failed to understand this, giving the actor nothing to play other than to physically repeat what is already in the words and music. When this happens the physical life of the song in performance seems artificial and contrived for its own sake. When subtext is there it provides the spring for the actor's

performance and allows him to create the effect of spontaneous expression, even within the rigid rhythmic structure which music imposes. This effect of spontaneity born of subtext - that is, the key of motivation - is in fact the concept of 'truth' in performance.

Naturally some musical theatre performers have an instinct for creating a sense of truth through song, yet there are far more whose constant cry to a director is along the lines of, "what shall I do with my hands?" This is particularly noticeable among actors who have done little singing. In spite of the argument for singing as a natural spontaneous expression, singing onstage presents particular challenges, not least that of subjugating the actor's usual control over timing to the rhythm of the music, and many performers have severe inhibitions in being able to sing publicly. In the creation of a methodology for examining song as text, the actor's mind is focused on dramatic essentials and away from self-consciousness.

In addition, the song is equally capable of textual analysis as, a poem. Certainly in poetic drama there is a rhythm which must be understood if the overall shape of a speech, and hence the sense of it, is to be fully expressed. In a similar way the rhythmic aspect of

music is a crucial part of the text in song. Also its coloration as music, contributes a whole vein of rich feeling which offers useful signposts to the singing actor. When this is allied to textual analysis of the lyric, the shape of the song and its physical performance, creating an effect of spontaneity, will become clear. It would take too long to repeat Craig's suggested process here, but his book is to be highly recommended. Nonetheless, there are two key factors in his work which should be mentioned here.

Firstly, the performer must submit to all the disciplines which song form entails. Since the music in song already creates a subtext of feeling, the actor must not fall into the trap of creating a further physical subtext of movement, gesture and body language which works against the music, for this will confuse the audience and muddy the dramatic moment.

Secondly, the key to his methodology is rooted in the concept of 'truth'. Every move must be motivated by thought. The actor's process is thought, followed by movement and then speech. For the singing actor, the process is thought, movement, song. Given the nature of song's heightened emotional plane, the actor in exploring the idea of subtext must ensure that the need to express through song is clear. The thoughts and

emotions which give rise to song are at the most intense moments in people's lives. The singing actor must ensure that the character's need to sing is urgent enough, otherwise the moment will seem false. From the need to sing rises the pattern of thought which is indicated in the music and lyric of the song, and this creates for the actor the necessary beats which indicate new thought. Thereafter, the physical performance of the song should follow naturally. Even when a number is conceived to display vocal ability, the singing actor must never display, where the singer probably would.

With the musical theatre's theatricalism of style, and its frequent emphasis upon presentational moments, it is not altogether surprising that it has developed clichès of performance, and one frequently finds them / employed by performers and writers at all levels, even in places where perhaps one might have expected better. Such tricks veer towards the aesthetic of opulence but undermine the drama and are to be deplored. When rediscovered and used for dramatic purpose however, they can be extremely powerful. On a choric level, Michael Bennett achieved such rediscovery in A CHORUS LINE, where the clichè of the kick-line was utilised with such force that the finale of the show became one of the peak moments of musical theatre achievement, spine-tingling

in its dynamic theatricality, yet chilling in its implication. Likewise, Dolly's arms outstretched to the adoring waiters, and by implication, the audience, is a striking example of a simple but effective turnaround of an old clichè - the Star's Entrance. Yet in every other show of Jerry Herman's where he has tried to utilise the same device - MAME, MACK AND MABEL, LA CAGE AUX FOLLES - the moment seems hollow and empty. No performer in the world, however charming to an audience could physicalise a new life into such theatrical trickery.

Clearly the singing actor must learn to distinguish between good writing for the singing actor, and that which makes him fall back on performing clichès in order / to try and create theatrical lift where the dramatic tension slackens due to lack of subtext. With a solid methodology in an approach to acting through song, the singing actor is able to evaluate material for its worth and play a creative part in bringing it to life.

The other aspect of musical theatre performing which has become widely accepted as standard is a broad performance style; a kind of larger-than-life quality. Certainly a 'size' of performance style would seem to be in line with the musical's heightened plane of emotion and its sense of being more real than reality. Just as

emotional essence is distilled through song, so the physical life of the song in performance must be part of that distillation, with both clarity of intent and amplified expression. Yet 'size' of physical life is not really the point here. The assumption of an external size of physicality in the belief that, 'that is the way it is done in musicals', is a falsehood. If the approach to intent and truth is correct, one has a blueprint for the physicality of the performance. Its actual size, however, in physical terms may be enlarged or diminished according to considerations of broader rhythms, dramatic intent and theatrical style. Nonetheless, in the heightened emotional plane of the musical, a singing actor must be able to expand the size of the performance without inhibition and at will, to reach a level that is far removed from naturalism, yet without distortion of the essence of truth in each moment. It is a simple enough process and one which with practice can become second nature, yet without proper textual analysis it is likely to seem false and contrived, and in the past such overblown size of performance for its own sake, has given the musical a bad name. One of the finest examples of recent years in which performers understood the principle of subtext, and hence size of performance, was in the London production of ME AND MY GIRL, a slight show in its

content, but one which was given a completely new lease of life by the careful work of Robert Lindsay and Emma Thompson, two performers who have worked in non-musical theatre and television comedy more often than in the musical, but who have pleasant singing voices. Applying the essences of acting technique to their material, they managed to make even the slightest numbers have great emotional resonance and the control of the physical size of the performance was admirable. Generally, they played with a certain restraint of size, and Lindsay in particular was able to create genuine thrill for the audience by even the slightest expansion of physical (and vocal) size. Ultimately, they both turned in performances of great charm and exemplary craft. On successive viewings with other casts, frequently drawn from the world of variety rather than acting, one was struck by how completely absent was the charm of the original pair, and the slightness of the material seemed to be emphasised, rather than enriched by the careful craft of the original performances.

A similar problem arose in the original production of SWEENEY TODD, whose American touring version was recorded for television and was generally acclaimed, not least for the performances of George Hearn and Angela Lansbury as Sweeney and Mrs. Lovett. Yet the performance is flawed. Firstly, the two juvenile

characters, Antony and Joanna, though perhaps the least well written of all the characters, emerging in a rather wooden, two dimensional light, were nonetheless played equally culpably as two-dimensional. When the material is as difficult to tackle as some of the writing for them, then actors must be very clear about their intent and the truth of the character's emotional essence at each moment if the performance is not to seem wooden and purely functional. In the television recording, Chris Groenendaal's performance as Antony reveals his discomfort, though probably unconscious, through a habitual tendency to act through his knees, always bending them slightly and leaning back at the same time, to try to give physical impetus and expression at points where he clearly has not tackled the problem of truth of Character motivation. Similarly, much of Lansbury's performance, though in many respects an extraordinary one, is full of performing tricks which establish a rapport between performer and audience, certainly, but which undermine the truth of character. This is most noticeable in 'By The Sea', perhaps the most problematic of all numbers in the show. It is a comedy number of great charm, in which Mrs. Lovett sings of her desire for a cosy English retirement by the sea in which she and Sweeney will live as a married couple and run a small guest house, even if he insists on continuing his grisly work:

"We'll have a nice cosy suite for the guest to rest in,
Now and then you could do the guest in!
By the sea... Wouldn't that be proper;
By the sea... bring along your chopper!
By the seaside... oo-oooh! By the beautiful sea!"

The lyric is a skilfully crafted one, combining Mrs. Lovett's cosy domesticity with her concessions to Sweeney's murderous tendencies, and also working in sexual innuendo, yet in context the number is potentially dramatically weak, for it adds nothing that we do not already know about both Mrs. Lovett's attitude and Sweeney's obsession. Lansbury fell for the temptation to play the number for out and out comedy, which worked very well, but holds up the action of the story, by now moving towards its denouement with alarming / alacrity. Act Two is in fact a wonderfully concise piece of structuring and plot weaving, and one almost suspects that the authors left in the number not so much for audience respite, but simply to give Lansbury a solo number in Act Two, which undoubtedly the audience would expect. As the number sits in the show, a performer must work hard to find the subtext to the song which gives it a full dramatic function. It is there to be discovered and rests in the nature of Sweeney's reaction to the song. Forever brooding on how he might get to Judge Turpin, he becomes more and more irritated by Mrs. Lovett's cheeriness, which equally becomes more and more

forced and desperate as she senses that she is in danger of losing Sweeney's attention. The heart of the number is actually very sad, for she is a lonely middle-aged woman seeking attention from a murderer, who, even as the number progresses, seems to be slipping away from her. As the song ends, Sweeney's potential violence against her is revealed and she desperately asks:

"You do love me just a little bit... don't yer?"

To lose the sadness at the heart of the song in favour of displaying the comedy is to lose its dramatic function, which significantly builds up the possibility of what is eventually going to happen in the final scene, where Sweeney flings Mrs. Lovett into her own oven. In the recorded performance, Lansbury misses out on this subtext of the song altogether, allowing us to admire the performer, but losing all sense of pathos, and denying our empathy with the character. In spite of the general acclaim for her performance, there are several other moments in both song and dialogue where she commits the same sin. By contrast, both George Hearn and Edmund Lyndeck as Judge Turpin provide eloquent examples of how commitment to the concept of truth in musical theatre performance can provide the source of powerful performance. Lyndeck, though playing a part which is written primarily as a villainous

character, manages to achieve great credibility and creates empathy with the character for the audience, even though we may not admire his actions. Hearn demonstrates the essence of emotional truth as the key to size of performance. Even on the small screen, the size of his playing never looks anything other than natural, though it is huge, for it springs from the emotional truths of Sweeney's inner self.

I have taken time to discuss these examples in detail since it is only in performance that one can witness the results of the working process of the singing actor. In addition, it is not enough to say that overall a performance is strong; Lansbury's say, in SWEENEY TODD. Any performance is made up of a string of individual moments - thoughts, responses, impulses. If any one of those is falsely played then the line of dramatic tension is inevitably slackened and the show as a whole will be less successful than it might be. Sometimes it is difficult to pin-point exactly where a performance fails, but invariably it is due to the lack of commitment in the actor's process to the aesthetic of discovery. The actor must commit himself to the idea of truth. The level of display in the whole show is rather the concern of the director. By rooting himself in the truth of each moment, the actor plays a vital role in

the creation of character in performance. Though the director may then manipulate the actor as part of the whole, essentially then, the singing actor and the character portrayed are people, not puppets.

Finally, with regard to the actor's process, the blueprint of song's physical performance allows the actor to recreate the life of the character at every performance, even in a long run, rather than mechanically reproducing external effects, allowing the actor to respond to the vital interaction of performance and audience. Experience of performers at all levels of musical theatre suggests that this approach to acting through song is given virtually no emphasis in the production process, attention going instead to the external effects of performance and actors being treated merely as cogs in the infernal machine of large scale production in the musical theatre. For this, ultimate blame must be placed firmly at the feet of the musical theatre director.

Directing the Musical.

As with all forms of theatre, one of the central functions of the director is in his/her work with actors during rehearsal, though there are many other functions to the director's r le in relation to the show as a whole.

Historically speaking, the rise of the Director is one of the most significant developments in theatre of the twentieth century, although something of the rôle was fulfilled in previous centuries by the leading actor and/or stage manager. What is of major importance in the emergence of the director as a separate figure is the conception of director as artist in his own right.

The same is historically true of the musical. The first amalgams given the label musical comedy were overseen by stage managers, but as emphasis developed on the Book, so the figure of director became increasingly used to ensure the Book's pre-eminence in the production process. What is different about the historical development of the director's rôle in the musical theatre from the non-musical stage is in the early emphasis upon the director as part of the collaborative process of creation. This, as already mentioned, is due primarily to the necessity for creation of a show to evolve during the rehearsal period, due to its presentational emphasis. By the time of WEST SIDE STORY in 1957, the director had assumed the primary place in the creation of the show. Indeed, in this particular instance, it was the director, Jerome Robbins, who was the initiator of the project. From then on, the director's rôle in the musical theatre has been very

much that of director/auteur, a rôle only rarely assumed in the non-musical theatre where the director is principally an interpretative artist.

As such, the director of musical theatre must clearly recognise the task to be undertaken, and its distinctions from directing in the non-musical theatre if the show is to be successfully realised.

As early as 1953, in *THE BAND WAGON*, the protagonist, a Broadway song-and-dance man, asks one of the writers of his new show about Geoffrey Cordova, the potential director, "Can he direct a Musical?" The writer replies, "He's the greatest director we have on Broadway - he can direct anything." Needless to say, Geoffrey Cordova attempts to direct the musical comedy as a Faustian tragedy and the show is a complete failure. The satire of *THE BAND WAGON* will certainly not be lost on those who have had to contend with directors of musicals who have no previous experience of the form.

Lehman Engel puts the matter more seriously:

"A stage director - even one generally considered excellent - should ideally have had experience with musical shows if that is what he is engaged for, because he must know about many things that do not exist in non-musical theatre."⁴

These 'many things which do not exist in the non-musical theatre' and the way in which they work together in the the musical are the stuff of this study, and crucially so, for as Hustoles writes:

"It is erroneous for the director to underestimate the difference between the musical and the regular drama, and yet many directors feel the task is equal."⁵

That they are not equal is self-evident from the outline of critical theory this study has proposed, yet there are aspects of the non-musical theatre and its practices which can be translated into musical theatre terms given the thorough understanding of the musical's process of synthesis, and the priority given to theatrical expression through song and dance.

Of course, Engel's comment captures the catch 22 aspect of directing, since it is advisable for musical theatre directors to have some experience of directing musicals before they are truly fit to direct musicals! How then does a director gain that experience? Training of directors in the non-musical theatre has always been a difficult problem. What, for example, should it include, and what form should it take? In the musical theatre, the training of directors is even more problematic, since the economics of mounting even the smallest scale musical are likely to reduce the

opportunities for directors to learn through actually mounting a full production. In addition, where directing forms part of training programmes, either in drama schools or in degree courses in drama/theatre arts, there is virtually no specialisation in musical theatre. Opera/music theatre programmes like the one at the Banff Centre for the Arts in Canada offer one or two opportunities for young directors to spend a year on attachment, but the specifics of musical theatre are rarely available in training. Many of the young directors who are lucky enough to gain the opportunity to direct musicals are those whose background is the non-musical theatre, and even then they are likely to be working on a much smaller scale than that of the West End or Broadway.

Most importantly, the director in the musical theatre should have working technical knowledge of all the four media employed by the musical - that is, music, words, dance and design. Without that knowledge, the director cannot hope to be in full control of the production elements, or to synthesise them into a consistent unity. In addition he must be able to focus all these media around the central performer and must fully understand the processes of the singing actor.

These, however are simply the mechanical tools of the trade by which the director translates the blueprint for performance into a living entity. More crucially still, he must be able to distil the ideological and dramatic essences of the show as the basis for the synthesis of all its working parts. In other words, not only must s/he be cognizant with the 'Hows' of musical theatre production, s/he must also focus attention on 'What' s/he is directing. As Hustoles correctly argues:

"Often a director finds himself concerned with the 'hows' (which) too often take precedence over the 'what'."8

Given the many different techniques which are employed by the musical theatre, it is perhaps not surprising that the director should be all too often overtaken by technical considerations, yet nonetheless, Hustoles' observation rightly reaffirms the 'what' - the Book - as the central focus of the musical's production process. He goes on to suggest that the director's job is to find a consistent stylistic and rhythmic unity to the show in performance, hence his generic approach to analysis of the musical theatre as a series of signposts to the director. His work is extremely useful, yet he is quick to point out that there are no hard and fast rules. Directors should, he suggests, use rules:

"not simply to define or limit, but to help guide and create."⁷

In his creative capacity, he may influence the process outlined in the last chapter by the devices of presentation he discovers together with his actors and production team during the rehearsal process. In addition he is the key to the process of synthesis, leading to theatrical realisation. When that process is successful, the sense of a unity will be complete; or as Hal Prince puts it, there will be a fluidity:

"like so much silk coming off a spool."⁸

Prince's view is that now most directors are achieving this, but this seems to be rooted in a perception that technology has done away with the clumsiness of both dramatic and theatrical changes of setting. Thus, fluidity of staging is common-place, but is frequently the sign of an adept designer rather than a competent director. In fact, there are very few who have truly mastered the art of total synthesis. Marvin Hamlisch's view is much more realistic:

"A major problem (with the contemporary musical) is the lack of great directors. When we write a show today, we all think of the same three or four people to direct - and after that, it's as if we've reached the B list. I mean, how can we zoom along if there are only four great directors?"⁹

His comment is made in the context of referring to directors of the thirties and forties in the American musical theatre who worked closely with the writers of shows and played a vital part in making them work on stage.

Almost all writers and critics acknowledge George Abbott as the grandfather of the modern musical theatre director, for his staging of musical numbers was both in accord with the demands of the song or music and also placed within the overall rhythmic and stylistic shaping of the show. His work created the arena in which Jerome Robbins could emerge as the first of the director/choreographers. And what an emergence, with WEST SIDE STORY remaining over thirty years later as one of the high points in the history of the modern musical. Both Michael Kidd and Bob Fosse were to follow Robbins in the next decade as if to emphasise that the director/choreographer was here to stay. All three were trained originally as dancers and then choreographers before becoming directors, and they symbolise a shift in the musical theatre which was to continue throughout the period examined in this study.

But why should there have been this emergence of the director/choreographer? As Leonard Bernstein sees it:

"It's not a vogue. I think it's a historical necessity that arose out of the very nature of our musical theatre - and the existence of someone called Jerome Robbins. Also our musical theatre has become highly choreographic and it needed somebody with his vision and energy to combine the functions."¹⁰

Has the musical theatre really become quite so choreographic? Micki Grant, one of the leading women composers in the American musical theatre, thinks it has and favours a show with an inventive emphasis on dance:

"I love choreography, and at the same time, recognise that you can do a musical with a minimum of it, though I think that today's audiences expect a musical to have choreography. A show has to be very special not to have it."¹¹

And yet there are more than a few examples of those 'very special' shows which do not have a specific emphasis upon dance, not least in the work of Sondheim. The emphasis upon choreography in terms of pure dance seems far from justified. Yet what both Grant and Bernstein try to identify is the use of choreographic principles in the aspect of synthesis which relates to staging. As such, there are two aspects of the musical theatre which are available to the director in achieving presentational synthesis in staging terms - that is, dance and design. Simplistically, dance concerns the arrangement of people, design concerns the arrangement of the physical space. We have already examined the essential qualities of expression which these two media

embody. Let us here though, look at their differing usages in shows of the set period in order to see how they have become crucial to the process of synthesis in line with the rise of the director/choreographer.

Dance and Design as Presentational Synthesis.

As Lynn Mahler Shelton says:

"it is movement which synthesises music and drama into a single unified theatrical expression."¹²

Over the last thirty years directors have found new ways to use dance and the technological developments in design to create a sense of a single physical dynamic which lies in line with the dramatic rhythm.

Hustoles' generic definitions outline the uses of dance as dramatic function. These are essentially:

- i) To carry plot.
- ii) To create mood or atmosphere.
- iii) To embody theme.
- iv) To replace dialogue.
- v) To generate comedy.
- vi) To extend a dramatic moment.
- vii) To provide spectacle.

Generally dance fulfils at least two of these / functions at once, not least because dance by its nature provides spectacle of some sort. Likewise design, though design's ability to genuinely replace dialogue or

carry plot has been tested in the musical theatre only rarely. Its further exploration has been more fully considered in forms such as performance art and opera where the symbolism of design elements reflects the emotional distillation of the music/theatre alliance.

Directors have sought to utilise these dramatic functions of dance and design in translating the dramatic structures of word and music to the stage, and the crucial factor in their usage is to place them at the service of the Book. When they are not used in this way, but serve only as spectacle they interrupt the dramatic rhythm of the piece as a whole and weaken it. A piece like 42ND STREET is of course a tribute to Gower Champion's understanding of the dramatic use of dance even when it is used merely as stylistic pastiche, for nonetheless it conveys theatrical thrill and sustains interest in a show where the narrative tension is slight to say the least. As such, it almost becomes a celebration of theatrical dance. What it does not become, is the non-dramatic event that was DANCIN', Bob Fosse's attempt to distil and present theatrical dance at its purest. Stripped of the necessities of drama however - either character or dramatic tension - the only possible interest was in the virtuosity of the performers. By the middle of a long run the performers had lost energy and precision and the show was the

ultimate in fraudulent drama. A kind of pure dance it may have been originally, but without technical prowess it became as nothing.

In CHICAGO on the other hand, Fosse utilised both the essences of dance as dramatic function and his own unique stylistic development of theatre dance to rich effect in its ironically thrilling 'Razzle Dazzle' where the sharpness of the routine is self-confessedly providing thrill which blinds the audience to the manipulative way in which they are being treated, and the simplicity with which such manipulation can be achieved. The Fascistic implications are clear. The machine of dance in the American musical is at once both dynamic and dangerous. A CHORUS LINE exposes the myth in a similar way with its stunning finale being at once both exciting and dehumanising. When such danger is not realised, the use of theatrical dance provides not a means of synthesis, but actually winds up at war with the dramatic content. In MISS SAIGON, the eleven o'clock number is 'The American Dream'. The lyrics strive for irony, but the staging of the number, with a chorus line of glittering dancers and the pimp, the Engineer, atop a pink Cadillac, allows the aesthetic of opulence to win over the audience and they receive the number as a celebration of the very thing the number (and the show) are seeking to criticise.

Similarly, in spite of technological advances which make the fluidity of staging much easier, technology has given design too a potential dictatorship which can override the dramatic essence if not used with care and always in the service of the Book. In the original production of SWEENEY TODD, the set design was based on an idea of an old iron foundry as metaphor for the social machine of the era of the Industrial Revolution - the world against which Sweeney revolts. Yet the set itself became so huge, sweeping out from under the proscenium arch and into the auditorium, that it dwarfed the actual characters and the gigantic figures of myth were reduced to the scale of flies. One felt neither in touch nor in sympathy with any of the characters onstage, and the large emotional size of the score was drastically reduced by an ill-considered choice of setting. When dramatic tension is lacking, of course, all too often shows have fallen back on scenic spectacle to make them appealing to the public. Yet the size of shows such as TIME, STARLIGHT EXPRESS and MUTINY in the West End with their hydraulics, huge production budgets and not much else, might suggest to those with an interest in drama that things have got out of balance.

Hal Prince, in his South Bank Show lecture, asserts that:

"size of production isn't important."¹³

Rather, he suggests directors are re-addressing two creative elements of the musical with regard to staging. One is the theatre as black box and the other is the crucial relationship between audience and performer in live theatre. Certainly MARCH OF THE FALSETTOES in its original New York production tackled both such ideas in its staging and came off all the more powerfully because of it. In the London production, a stylistic veneer was given to the production but failing to really address the actor/audience relationship implicit in the writing distanced the audience both emotionally and physically from the show. And that's a particular shame since in all good writing, as the Book is turned into structure, so the musical dramatist will intrinsically weave a built-in staging mechanism. This may often be unconscious, yet it may equally well be the starting point of the show's development as we have pointed out.

In Michael Bennett's work, the staging conception was undoubtedly a primary source of inspiration in the development of the show. A CHORUS LINE and BALLROOM were both rooted in the real world of dance - the former as it relates to the theatre, and the latter as it relates to the social dances of the ballroom. By DREAMGIRLS, Bennett had crafted a conception of pure

kinetics which allowed for total fluidity and synthesis of movement, light, setting and costume as reflective of the dramatic line in words and music. The show in performance was a masterpiece of energy and forward motion, often preventing the writing itself from falling into sentimentality or mawkishness even when tempted to so do. Such is the power of kinetics in the hands of master craftsmen, and Bennett was undoubtedly the most assured of all the director/choreographers thus far. His original conception for CHESS in London was to create the show around the Arbiter and his cronies - a kind of neo-Fascist, post-punk, power-base - who were constantly present and constantly aware. The three central characters were as pawns in the power games. When Bennett fell sick, and the rôle of Director was taken over by Trevor Nunn, Nunn was unable to follow Bennett's kinetic vision, for he had directed very few musicals before and certainly not in the Bennett mould of choreographic direction, and thus down-played the Arbiter and the chorus, in spite of Bennett having cast the best available dancers in town for the rôles, and / proceeded to fall back on a suggestive realism of setting which demanded a series of hotel rooms on boat trucks, hundreds of different chairs and a back projection of the Alps which reminded one more of THE SOUND OF MUSIC than of CHESS. Bennett's set needless to

say had been sparse, high-tech and fluid, making the most of computer technology and advancing the potential of theatrical kinetics he had been exploring to that time.

Similar mistakes occur again in Nunn's work on ASPECTS OF LOVE, where the desire for suggestive realism of setting serves only to hold up the action rather than serve it. A bold director would have found a way of more imaginatively distilling the essence of the story and creating a theatrical world rather than a representational one. Nunn's work on musicals has always been noticeably lacking in its vision of theatrical kinetics and this author finds his work directing musicals highly over-rated for this reason.

Alongside a Fosse or a Bennett, the British musical theatre has yet to come up with a director of note even half as capable of fully realising and utilising the musical's theatricalism and its inherent 'kinaesthetic' to advantage. Almost uniquely, too, Fosse was able to translate that understanding to film, in both the film versions of SWEET CHARITY and CABARET, making the camera part of the choreography in a manner which perfectly suited his distinctive style of isolation, and perhaps most imaginatively of all in the original musical film ALL THAT JAZZ where both the 'Take Off With Us' sequence

and the series of hospital visions stand as unique tribute to Fosse's imagination and genius.

Bernstein's recognition of Robbins' importance is significant however, not least because of his work on FIDDLER ON THE ROOF, not a show most noted for its dance elements, yet the same choreographic principles are at work. Perceiving the idea of the Stadtl (and in Jewish culture as a whole) the principle of cyclic containment and regeneration, Robbins fed this idea into every element of production, hence the Chagall-like designs for the backdrop which depicted the full circular enclosure of the Stadtl, and also the circular patterns of his choreography and staging. Look for such a thorough ideological underpinning to any of the current 'blockbuster' musicals and you would be hard-pressed to find anything similar. There are currently very few directors with the appropriate experience, understanding or vision. In addition, as already mentioned, a director of musicals must have the full range of technical vocabularies at his disposal if he is to assume full responsibility. Yet a good director knows also that full responsibility is only the starting point for collaboration and delegation.

Creator And Interpreter.

Sheldon Harnick, half of the writing team that helped create FIDDLER ON THE ROOF believes in a divided responsibility as part of the collaborative process of creation:

"In a way, FIDDLER ON THE ROOF is not a good example of divided responsibility because once we got Jerome Robbins, he took total responsibility. Whenever he does a show, he has a complete vision of it which encompasses all of its elements, so that he becomes your boss; he is a dictator... he gets involved in every conceivable element."¹⁴

Of course, Harnick here somewhat blurs the distinction between the director as creator and the director as enabler of the production process. in the former role Harnick wishes the director to share responsibility. It is likely that if Robbins were to share responsibility for the latter role, Harnick would be very upset and feel that the production was not handled properly.

Harnick takes for granted that in the world of the musical, the original director is very much part of the creative process. As co-author then, he must collaborate. Yet as head of the production process which leads to the staging of the performance, he must have total responsibility. As Richard Rodgers says:

"The most important member of the production staff of any musical is the director."¹⁵

This is certainly true, and is emphasised more than in the non-musical theatre by the expansion of both media and personnel over which the director must retain control. It is, of course, the exercising of that control and the manner in which the director's power is used that are crucial to the effectiveness of the director.

Some, like Robbins, seem to believe in the absolute power of the director, as upheld by Rodgers, and the creative visions of the director/choreographers certainly uphold that traditional view. Yet, there is a danger in this that one fills the world with dictators rather than directors. Given the extra discipline needed to manage the extra media and personnel of the musical theatre, the director must compensate with extra humour, patience and organisational clarity if s/he is to retain the trust of his/her company. Even in recognising the rise of the director as creative artist (in addition to the interpretative role), one is in danger of adding to the cult of directing, which places the director and the directing process above the resulting performance. Hustoles notes this danger,¹⁶ and stresses the collaborative nature of musical theatre. Yet most of this collaboration has

historically been for the purpose of bringing expertise in all the technical aspects of the musical's media to bear on the creative and production processes. If a single person has these technical skills to hand, then there is no real reason for collaboration. The only additional aspect of collaboration which may be seen as an advantage is that it provides a system of checks and balances to the director/dictator. Equally, one may consider it a hindrance or limitation to the spontaneity of a single artistic vision. However one decides, the danger must be noted.

Hal Prince, more than many directors has had a huge influence upon the creation of many shows, sharing in the creation of shows from CABARET, through a series of extraordinary shows working with Stephen Sondheim and his collaborators during the 'seventies, to EVITA and PHANTOM OF THE OPERA in London in the 'eighties. In the case of CABARET he now feels in retrospect that the collaborative process somewhat diluted the innovation of the show's treatment of its story, leading to a compromise which never really felt comfortable. Certainly anyone coming to direct the stage version of CABARET today is faced with the legacy of that compromise, which was so brilliantly reconciled in the film version. Yet on the whole, he is a director noted

for his contribution to the collaborative process rather than his domination of it. Indeed, of all the shows with Stephen Sondheim, it is Sondheim himself who is always remembered as the single outstanding name of the collaborative team even though Prince invariably played a crucial rôle in the creation of the shows. Only in the case of one show - SWEENEY TODD - was it Sondheim's vision alone which was the inspiration and driving force behind the project. In all the others, it was a combination of Sondheim, Prince and fellow collaborators (George Furth, Hugh Wheeler, James Goldman). As such, Prince is very much in the line of director/auteur, and not of the director/choreographer line.

In fact, Prince had no background in performing of any kind, but came into directing from the world of producing. His shows have little choreographic concept in the Robbins or Bennett sense; yet they do have an overall sense of unity of purpose and style coupled with a thoroughness of ideology that gives them weight and consistency regardless of the actual material with which he is working. Although Trevor Nunn would seem to be in the same line as Prince, one only has to compare the skilful staging of PHANTOM OF THE OPERA with the often clumsy and inappropriate wieldiness of ASPECTS OF LOVE to sense a major difference in efficacy of the two directors.

Someone who has followed very strongly in the Prince tradition is James Lapine, not least because of his picking up a collaboration with Sondheim at the time when Prince and Sondheim discontinued their work together. Lapine was originally a playwright and came to work as a director/auteur with William Finn on MARCH OF THE FALSETTOES at the Playwrights Horizons Workshop Series in New York. Where Finn's earlier Marvin Hamlisch musical IN TROUSERS had been anarchic, fresh, angry and more than a little chaotic, Lapine disciplined his work into a tighter structure, allowing plenty of scope for Finn's imagination to play freely, but also providing a more coherent experience for the audience. In doing so he demonstrated an instinct for the musical all too rare, allowing the show to grow in its own terms. Finn has nothing but raves for Lapine:

"Lapine is so calm, working with him is like taking a vacation. You feel no pressure, only a sense of 'of course you're going to finish; of course you're going to do good work'. He comes to you every day and says, 'If you don't like what I've staged, I'll change it.' And there's nothing you don't like; nothing to change."¹⁷

In working with Sondheim as composer/lyricist, Lapine became author/director in the fullest sense and the musical's creative collaboration was reduced to just two people. The two shows they have created together are possibly the purest expressions of the musical

theatre's synthesis to date, being from conception to realisation a single driving idea being focused, expressed and presented under the watchful senses of the two collaborators. Both are distinct, powerfully original shows which take the musical as close as it has come to Fine Art, in SUNDAY IN THE PARK in a show about art, in INTO THE WOODS in popular mode, rooted in the fables and myths of our age. Both too are visionary and truly Romantic. Where, it seems, on occasion perhaps, especially in MERRILY WE ROLL ALONG, Prince's authorial voice did not have the craft and authority to match Sondheim's, Lapine's most certainly does. In these two shows, not only do we witness the full blooming of the Sondheim talent, but also the full emergence of a talent which is set to dominate the musical theatre in the next decade, should Lapine choose to continue working in it. If he does not, it will be the musical's loss. With the recent deaths of Bennett, Champion and Fosse, the musical theatre has lost most of its great director/choreographers without providing replacements. If it is not able to attract director/auteurs of the calibre of Lapine, it is in danger of losing out on the claim of even 'three or four great directors'.

In the U.K., there has never been a tradition of director/choreographer, rather our musical theatre directors have been culled from the worlds of the

classic stage and from opera. Currently, Nick Hytner has been acclaimed as a director for his work on MISS SAIGON, yet given the weaknesses of the show's ideology, his work in the rôle of creator leaves much to be desired. Likewise Mike Ockrent, in directing the revised version of FOLLIES for the West End stage allowed the piece to get stuck in its realistic setting of a party. Both design and staging kept pulling us back to that reality even as the show wanted to pull us deeper into the inner follies of the characters and the surreal level of dreams and interactions through time. In the worlds of classic drama and opera, there is a tendency for directors to be noted for their individual conception brought to bear upon a classic text or score. There is a danger in bringing such an approach to the musical theatre for it can lead to the destruction of the careful interplay of media in the musical. On the other hand, it can be extremely refreshing for too often the musical's original production is treated as sacrosanct, not least because of the difficulties in distinguishing the creation of the musical's blueprint from its first production process. Yet for all directors, whether working on a new musical or not, the crucial factor is one not of creation, but interpretation. Prince notes the problem:

"it's the difference between expressing myself and repeating myself."¹⁸

Certainly this is a dilemma for all interpretative artists. In working with someone else's material, one discovers method of work which help to realise an interpretation in performance. Yet all too easily these methods can become tricks and are then used for their own sake - not really because the show demands them. Sondheim believes that:

"very few directors superimpose a style."¹⁹

Yet one is tempted to say that he has been fortunate to work with the best directors. Many of us will no doubt have seen shows or been in shows where the director has attempted to do just that! And, moreover, there is the temptation to utilise one's own discovered devices of direction for the purpose of displaying directorial flair rather than in response to the dramatic moment. Again, such directorial conceits weaken the dramatic power of the show. Crucially, it is a question of responding to each show in its own terms, and there are four crucial questions a director should ask:

- i) WHAT is the show about?
- ii) HOW does it work?
- iii) WHAT resources do I have?
- iv) WHO is it for?

In effect, these four questions for the director relate to the four variables of our critical model for analysis, translated into the practical language of the director. In assessing all four media in relation to both the dramatic imperatives and theatrical realities of the show, the director can lay the groundwork for his rehearsal process leading to performance. Clearly, compared to the non-musical theatre, the levels of complexity are far greater, and the technical demands on the director magnified many times. As Rodgers and Hammerstein colourfully described it:

"Not much less than war is the musical theatre, and its complexities are compounded by the fact that the relationships among its components are not defined and absolute as they are in the army, but subtle, tenuous and usually emotional... A quick glance at the theatre programme for any musical show reveals a staggering number of separate elements. These must compliment each other and become fused if the total effort is to stand as a valid artistic representation."²⁰

The person ultimately responsible for this process of synthesis is the director. However, there are those who would argue the case and suggest that the ultimate responsibility lies with the producer!

Producing The Musical.

Just as the director is ideally the artistic controller of the musical in production, so the producer

is ideally the financial controller of the production. 'The Producer', whether as individual or an organisation, in theory controls all the economic factors which affect the mounting of the musical show. At least that is the root of the producer as distinct from the director; yet in practice the lines are frequently less clearly drawn.

At its purest, the producer's job is to raise financial backing for the project, whether it be five pounds or five million pounds, and, having appointed a director for the show, to agree budgeting for the entire production, leaving artistic matters to the director concerned. But given the inevitability of the saying, 'money is power', the producer holds far more power over the artistic matters of a show than most directors would like to admit. In effect, producers frequently have real control over any or all of the following:

- a) the basic idea and source materials for a new show, coupled with the employment of the musical dramatist(s),
- b) the employment of the director
- c) the casting of 'stars'
- d) the employment of significant figures in the production team
- e) the siting and timing of the production
- f) the marketing of the show.

Yet any decision made by the producer on these matters are less likely to be governed by artistic concerns than commercial ones - exactly as it should be, given the producer's economic responsibility to the production as a whole. In effect all the considerations a producer will give to a) to e) in the above list will be based upon the consideration of f) - a broad policy of selling as many seats as possible and maximising income from the original investment.

Commerciality, as such, should not be decried. Given the prominence of the audience in the very existence of a dramatic performance at all, it is artistically valid to wish for the work to be seen by as large an audience as possible over a series of performances. Clearly the selling of the show is a crucial part of attracting the audience, and vital to the popular nature of the musical theatre, Prince's:

"commercial art form."²¹

Engel, the foremost apologist for the Artist in the musical theatre, nevertheless emphasises that:

"the commercial aspect is very important to an understanding of the situation as a whole."²²

and Arthur Jackson concurs:

"Outstanding musical plays achieved their success by a blend of artistry and commercial validity."²³

So far, this study has dealt almost exclusively with aspects which affect the musical's artistic validity - that is, what makes a musical 'good' or 'bad' in artistic terms. In the world of commerciality such terms are meaningless, the only two of significance being 'hit' or 'flop'. The former is a show which returns its initial investment and does enough business to make a profit for the investors. The latter doesn't!

At its most ideal, the world would make a direct parallel between a 'good' show and a 'hit' show, yet of course it doesn't. 'Good' shows may not sell at all well, where a 'bad' show artistically may be one of the hits of the season. The balance between artistic and commercial considerations is one which goes on at all times in the musical theatre, and is one in which producers must have as much understanding of artistic concerns as artists must have of commercial ones.

Yet this has always been the case in the relationship between artists and producers. During the period which this study examines however, there have been significant changes in the balance which have affected the very nature of musical theatre as a whole, and which influence the criteria by which judgements are made concerning shows and their productions.

The first major signifier of change is of course the expansion in terms of real cost of production. In 1957 the original investment in WEST SIDE STORY was \$58,000. In 1989 the production budget for MISS SAIGON in the West End was £8 million, or approximately \$12 million. Even taking inflation into account, this is still an astronomical increase in the cost of production. Such increase is emphasised when one makes a comparison with the rise of production costs of the non-musical theatre. Proportionally in line with its larger personnel and with its emphasis upon theatrical spectacle, the musical's percentage increase in cost is way above that of the non-musical theatre.

Such a vast increase in actual cost places greater emphasis than previously upon the idea of theatre as 'product' to be sold and the importance of a commercial policy. Thus there has been a corresponding increase in ticket prices, above and beyond inflation. Best seats for a Broadway show now cost as much as \$75, while in the West End £25 would be about the average price for a top-price ticket to a musical. William Finn feels it has gone too far:

"Broadway's dead right now... it's a sick animal, and because theatre tickets cost so much, the producers have done it. Cheaper tickets are a must, otherwise it's a dead end."²⁴

In addition to actual ticket prices being raised, there has grown an emphasis on discovering methods of ensuring pre-opening ticket sales, hoping thereby to guarantee the investment regardless of critical response to the show itself. In order to achieve this, marketing has come to dominate much of the public's perception of what a show is and what they might expect of it, often with less than a strict regard for the artistic concerns of the show. Methods of successful marketing have been many and varied, but most especially in relation to the work of Andrew Lloyd-Webber and his various collaborators we can see the differing techniques at work.

The release of a single into the pop music charts shortly before the show is due to open, or shortly after it has opened, especially when coupled with a video, as in the case of PHANTOM OF THE OPERA, proves extremely helpful, not least for the mass media exposure which brings the show to the widest possible attention of the public, something which the show alone could never hope to achieve. The development of a single image or logo identified with the show, such as the eyes for CATS, or the single mask for PHANTOM OF THE OPERA, can be crucial, as can the production and sale of ephemera connected with the show and its image. Marketing centred upon the production's unique thrills has proved

especially useful for shows where the actual dramatic content may be less than full. For CATS audiences, there was always the possibility that they 'might not be admitted while the auditorium is in motion', while for STARLIGHT EXPRESS the thought of roller-skating trains racing in and out of the audience, over bridges and through tunnels provides not only the prospect of dynamic thrill, but more crucially the element of danger. In both these cases, something could go wrong, and the audience is attracted to what is essentially the thrill of the circus. Finally, and significantly exploited by the Robert Stigwood organisation in the case of EVITA was the media attention devoted to casting, in this case because the expected actress, Julie Covington, who had recorded the pre-show album of the score and had a number one hit with 'Don't Cry For Me Argentina', turned down the stage role, and the search was on to find another actress for the part. Stigwood's press office was quick to capitalise on the Cinderella aspect of the story, especially when the part went to a virtual unknown at the time, Elaine Paige.

Such marketing tactics are the result of applying management principles to musical theatre production. Such principles are, of course, rooted in corporate structures, not in the idea of the individual producer,

as was certainly still the case at the time of WEST SIDE STORY's creation. Since then however, there have been very few individual producers, with those there are having to develop their own corporate identities in order to compete with the larger organisations such as Shuberts in New York, or the Really Useful Company in London.

The development of the corporate producer has a further effect in that individual producers were rarely tempted to invest personally in the shows which they were producing, but tempted individual and corporate finance sources to back the production with a chance of capitalising on investment, and an equal chance of losing the investment and writing it off against tax allowances. Corporate producers however have not the slightest intention of losing money. Since they exist primarily as a business, all investment in the show must be seen as a potential profit earner; thus corporate producers demand return on their investment. Most are not interested in the personal aspect of Rodgers and Hammerstein's 'war' zone, or the meeting of artists; they want to sew up every possible leakage of their investment. As Stephen Schwartz puts it:

"Anyone who has recently tried to do a Broadway show knows why you can't do one. There are no producers. The Theatre owners have taken over, and it doesn't work the same way with people who are essentially businessmen. It's not that they lack artistic judgement. What they lack is artistic PASSION!"²⁵

Hal Prince puts it more gently:

"You used to be able to say, 'you may lose your money, but you'll be proud of your investment'. Now they're monoliths and they want their money back."²⁶

Of course, Prince, having started out working for a producer should know, though he still fundamentally means investors rather than actual producers. Nonetheless, theatre artists of all spheres bemoan the power that producers hold due to the fact that they hold the purse-strings.

The alternative, of course, is for artists to become their own producers. Again it is probably Andrew Lloyd-Webber who has shown the most enterprise in this area, leading his Really Useful Group to quotation on the London Stock Exchange as a public company. Nonetheless, the likelihood of this happening is rare indeed. When artists become their own producers, they generally will do so by working on a scale much smaller than that of the large commercial sector theatres. In the U.S.A. this means in stock, and in Off or Off-Off-Broadway productions. The advantages of this are in

providing valuable experience and to create an arena for new work to be tried out. In the U.K. this generally means working through a non-profit distributing company and applying for public sector funding and private sponsorship in order to mount new work. As the situation stands the funding bodies in the U.K. do not take any responsibility for musical theatre as an art form in its own right, and very little funding is available. The lack of opportunities presented to musical theatre artists outside the commercial sector are very few indeed, but when they come to fruition they are fine testament to the fact that commercial considerations of the musical should not be confined to what is most readily identified as the 'commercial' producing agencies and theatres. In fact such limitation of vision is a weakness of most of the 'commercial' musical theatre producers since they never conceive of working on any other scale and in any other way than the one they are most used to handling. When the cry comes that the musical is dying, or that there are no producers, it simply isn't true. What it means is that there are not enough producers who have the vision to view beyond the immediate security of their habitual place and process of work. Such lack of vision coupled with the financial constraints placed upon the musical, both inherent and external, create a situation

with dangerous implications for the health of the musical theatre as a whole.

Firstly, there is bound to be a lesser volume of work than in the past, which immediately creates less chance of a show being really good in artistic terms. Secondly, the risk factor for producers is so high that they will control everything possible to try to ensure a hit, even though the decisions may work against the artistic integrity of the show. Given the necessity to reduce risk, the musical will be less free to tackle issues in terms of its subject matter in case it offends part of the potential audience, and there will be no room for new talent or training through experience since producers cannot risk losing a paying audience through ineptitude of craft. Some, including Prince, suggest that such a set of tenets on production values will lead to 'safe' work and stagnation.²⁷

Such stagnation is not necessarily inevitable; in fact, is unlikely. Regeneration of ideas, form, content, processes, and audiences has been a constant feature of the last thirty years in the musical theatre, just as any culture remoulds itself constantly. That is why we can get a HAIR or a ROCKY HORROR SHOW which in many ways seem to go against the traditional production arenas of the musical. Both, notably went on to find

their own audience and became huge hits, even though a traditional producer would have laid bets against the fact. These are the dangers of narrowness of vision from producers, most especially when they begin to equate their own instinct for selling a show to the public with the formula for creating a 'good' show.

Such an elevation of the producer to artist seems a dangerous move. In the television film, 'The Making Of MISS SAIGON' there was a truly frightening moment when Cameron Mackintosh was seen singing along with Claude Schonberg as if trying to tell the composer how the tune should sound to the audience. This author's admiration for Mackintosh as one of the greatest contemporary individual producers is, I believe, well founded, judging by Mackintosh's production record, coupled with his instinct for material, but he is no composer/musical dramatist. His instinct and his reaction may be useful, but one got from the moment on screen, a sense of what can happen when a producer sees himself as an artist.

Mel Brooks' very funny film, THE PRODUCERS satirises this danger by cleverly inverting the situation. His producers exercise their artistic judgement in choice of show, choice of director, casting, design and so on, in order to stage a flop,

which will prove extremely beneficial to them financially. They think they do everything right, but end up with a smash-hit comedy musical in 'Springtime for Hitler'. In the really dangerous world of the musical, producers have been guilty of wielding their producer's power in order to influence a show artistically and ended up with a flop.

Similarly, when a producer plays safe in order to try to ensure a hit, he is just as likely to squeeze all life out of the production and end up with a flop.

Inevitably, the balancing act between commercial and artistic consideration is one that will be perpetual. Each show will try to resolve it successfully and amicably, with director and producer working in harmony towards the good of the show as whole. After all, there are enough risks being taken as it is. Prince, both producer and director sums up with this:

"You know (the musical) is dangerous, but you don't know how popular it's going to be, or if it's going to be influential."²⁸

In the final analysis, a musical lives or dies, not by its ideas or themes, not by its form or its structure, not by its rehearsals, its director, its personnel, or its producer, but by one thing alone - its

audience. Without it, there is no musical theatre.

Jerry Herman sums it up:

"I am accused of being too commercial. Too commercial? What is that? I think being accused of too much commerciality is like saying the bride is too pretty. To me, the ultimate compliment is to be called commercial. It's my goal... Personally, I'm writing for all those people out there and if I can't reach them, I've failed."²⁹

CHAPTER 8

FOOTNOTES

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CHAPTER 9

HOLD UP THE MIRROR - THE FUNCTION OF THE MUSICAL.

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Another Opening, Another Show...

The opening performance of any theatrical production is a crucial time in its existence, but this is especially so if it is a new musical which has been created from scratch, with emphasis upon the living development of the show during the rehearsal period. In addition, the economics of the musical mean there is more to gain or lose, more at stake financially than in the non-musical theatre. Such a situation re-emphasises the vital rôle played by the audience in the musical theatre.

If all the workings of the show in performance operate smoothly then the creative team are likely to be reasonably happy, yet really the opening night is the night of judgement for the musical; and not only for the individual show itself, but as another test of the long-standing relationship between the musical theatre form and the needs of its audience. The continuity of that relationship exists not so much in shifting stylistic or aesthetic tastes as it does in the deeper understanding of the musical as drama. Hustoles writes:

"Audience response to the drama, more so than the music, is what provides continuity."¹

This is fundamentally true and opening night provides the first occasion on which audience response will become part, if not the most important part, of the assessment of the show's artistic merits and commercial prospects. Of course, first nights are notoriously artificial as audiences, made up, as they generally are, from friends and family of the cast and crew, interested theatre professionals, celebrities and dignitaries invited for the purpose of public relations, and the Critics. Perhaps if anything, this audience is hyper-critical, yet a greater fear is perhaps that their response will not be honestly expressed during the performance. Traditionally the musical was developed 'on the road', prior to a major opening on Broadway or in the West End, though now more frequently one finds a show giving an extended period of reduced price previews in order to play the show in front of an audience and make any necessary changes to the production before the opening night. In addition, some shows have been developed in reasonably secure workshop processes, such as A CHORUS LINE through Joseph Papp's Public Theatre in New York, and SUNDAY IN THE PARK WITH GEORGE, whose first act was written and presented during a season at the Playwright's Horizons Workshop, also in New York. A

final way of stalling the judgements of audiences and critics is to have a series of Press Nights over an extended period of time, a practice which is much more common since newspapers, especially those in London, placed less emphasis on printing reviews of shows the following morning.

The Word Is Law...

To the continuing complaint of most theatre artists, the only real record of audience response is that of the critics for our newspapers, magazines, radio and television. It is a situation which irritates artists because all criticism is naturally partly subjective, and all too often are raised cries against the critics that they, a select few, are non-representative of the majority of a show's audience. Yet essentially this is all sour grapes. A love hate relationship has existed for centuries between theatre artists and critics, each acknowledging their need for the other, and any misunderstanding between the two groups usually growing out of a disagreement over the critic's function.

Any critic will tell you that his/her function is a journalistic one - to help sell more papers or attract more viewers - dictated by the critic's higher editorial policy. This is borne out by the different styles of

criticism which we associate with different media outlets. They believe they have no responsibility to the theatre itself, either in attracting audiences or responding to the craft of the production and giving feedback to the artists on their work. If these things do happen, they are a secondary effect, not a primary aim.

Contrast this view with that of Glen Loney in his introductory remarks to the Conference on the Musical Theatre in America:

"Reviews of musicals are not merely consumer guides, though some may choose to treat them that way. They are also - or should be - considered, accurate, insightful commentaries on productions and the creative impulses behind them. The problem then, for some practising critics is that they simply lack the knowledge to deal effectively with certain elements of a musical production... Perhaps the American musical theater needs a new breed of viewers."²

Such is the cry of the artist. Richard Rodgers distils the problem further:

"...critics are not seers. They simply react to what they are seeing and hearing for the first time, and their reactions vary."³

This is true, as we have said, since there is an element of subjectivity. Yet Rodgers goes on to point out that most critics are unable to properly appreciate the musical elements of a score on one hearing. In the

theatre, he acknowledges, the critic is in no different a position than the audience at the musical, but he believes that due to their power and influence, especially in the printed form, critics should take the responsibility to study the score of a show prior to previewing it.

Burt Bacharach concurs:

"Critics have got too much to do on a first night. They have to review the sets, the show, the actors, the singing, the clothing, and a score that they're hearing for the first time. I always felt it was a little unfair."⁴

Yet both implicitly demand appreciation of the elements of the musical (especially the score, since they are composers!) in their own terms, not as facets of a whole, single dramatic entity. The critic's only real job in the musical is to appraise the dramatic/theatrical whole in the terms it sets itself. All technical knowledge will be of help to him in appreciating why certain moments work or not, but it is not the fundamental task of the critic. Early in this study we noted how critics have been guilty of bringing fixed attitudes to the theatre. When they display an attitude which centres on more flexibility of dramatic expectation, artists cry for them to be more specific.

Hamlish has a veneer of acceptance:

"What you finally learn I guess, is that critics don't know the first time around. You're asking a critic to watch an entire show, write a review in two hours or so, and without listening to an album, tell you musically what it was all about."⁵

Yet at heart it is the same cry... and the same error. The critic must not tell us what the show was 'musically all about'. He must tell us what theatrically it was all about. All musical dramatists seem to share this basic misunderstanding about critics, possibly because they find they get so little positive feedback on their not inconsiderable artistic efforts, both from drama critics who focus upon the dramatic essentials of the musical and from music critics who see their work as trivial.

Nonetheless, such a misunderstanding by artists is no excuse for critics of the musical not to take their responsibility seriously and to be clear at least about the fullest possible vocabulary of criticism that they may use. What most artists sense is that most critics of the musical theatre have no conception of the different principles of creation and performance of the musical theatre from the non-musical.

Since this is the case, artists need to learn to filter responses to their work and maintain their own

critical standards. Betty Comden and Adolph Green suggest that the best way to pick up audience response is quite literally to eavesdrop in the foyer:

"You listen to what they're saying, not necessarily the critics. We like the idea of going out of town. You have to listen to the audience, plus keeping in mind what your own intention was."⁶

The latter point is, of course, an important one, and relates back to the consistency of intention between all parties working in the creative collaboration. The Artist has to retain an instinct and trust for that original intention.

Commercially though, it is true that critics in the U.S.A. still have more direct influence on the state of the musical theatre than in the U.K., or elsewhere. Frank Rich of the New York Times is currently the drama critic whose opinion most counts. A bad review from Rich can close a show almost overnight (as David Hare, the playwright found to his cost when transferring his hit play THE SECRET RAPTURE from London's National Theatre). Similarly, a good review can create good box office business equally fast and boost the career of a young artist. There is no doubt that Rich's review of MARCH OF THE FALSETTOES was a key factor in both its commercial success and the subsequent recognition of Finn's talent as composer/lyricist.

Fred Ebb sees a danger in this power of the critic:

"The theatre's in difficulty because it's all about reviewers and obscene amounts of money. It's about reviewers who say, 'Please take risks' and yet the shows that do take risks, critics condemn, and then they don't have audiences. It's a catch twenty-two: the critics are asking you to do something that doesn't seem possible."⁷

In the U.K., no single critic holds that much power, nor have critics in general given a significant amount of coverage to the musical. Certain critics such as Robert Cushman, Sheridan Morley and Jack Tinker have been unequivocal about their support for the musical as a theatrical form, but in general, the drama critics who write on the musical seem less interested in it as a separate form than their American counterparts who at least recognise its significant place within their culture. However, the situation has changed to some degree since the New York Times sent three reviewers to see WEST SIDE STORY in 1957, and now it is almost always the drama critic who reviews musical theatre. Since that is the case, there may well be more than a grain of truth in the cries of the artists, echoed by Glenn Loney when he says:

"there is a handicap from which drama reviewers suffer; inadequate knowledge about music and about... effective stage use of musical forms... the same may be said of choreography."⁸

Unlike the artists, Loney realises that what is crucial is the understanding of 'effective stage use' of music and choreography. That is, he feels critics of drama alone are not au fait with the principles of song and dance as drama, which are the quintessential tools of the musical dramatist's trade. In that case, no critic has yet been a true musical theatre critic.

Interestingly, it is in the U.K. that the first critic appointed specifically to cover musical theatre emerged at The Independent newspaper, and he is Mark Steyn. His own background allows him to focus on the craft of song-writing, especially in terms of lyrics, and its dramatic employment. In addition he frequently tries to give a historical context to new musical theatre shows. While this has focused attention upon the musical theatre's specific skills and demands, Steyn's own tone of criticism is dangerously superior. His many pieces are in danger of merely repeating the same principles of craft, as if Steyn were some kind of self-appointed defender of the faith, and that musical theatre artists had better heed him or else prepare to meet their inevitable doom. Also, this stance demands that he damn all work in order that he might display his own critical knowledge, so that in the end one is tempted to ask, "If he knows so much better than artists, why isn't he one?" The same is true of Steyn as was said by George Jean Nathan of all critics:

"The major difficulty with critics of the drama has always been that, having once positively enunciated their critical credos, they have been constrained to devote their entire subsequent enterprise and ingenuity to defending the fallacies therein."⁹

Certainly, one senses that Steyn would be defensive of his critical stance in a fashion not best suited to the development of sound criticism as whole.

Critics must, of course, have some understanding of the principles of form of the media in which they work. For reviewers not to have some knowledge of the workings of song and dance as dramatic expression would be akin to chefs not knowing why they use certain ingredients when baking a cake.

Academic scholarship is somewhat different from journalistic criticism in that its fundamental aim is not the same. Steyn, as a reviewer, tends towards academic clarification of process and principle, which makes for singularly uninteresting journalism. Where the reviewer's job is to help make his or her medium more attractive to the public, the academic's aim is to clarify thoughts and ideas connected with the form being examined, and should always aim to be constructive.

In the end however, the only real place for assessing the musical's success or failure, is in performance and the audience response, which is the

major gauge by which we might evaluate whether a piece holds any value beyond its internal merit as a well crafted piece of work. In this relationship between the musical theatre and its audience lies the root of its description as popular and any claim it may have to serving a broader socio-cultural function other than that of 'pure entertainment'.

A Kind Of Mirror.

The broad popular appeal of the musical is proven by any glance at figures showing the percentage total theatre audiences who attend musicals. Recent figures from the Arts Council of Great Britain suggest that an average of 33% of all audiences are for musical theatre. Why should the form hold such an appeal? In principle, we have seen how the musical has a capacity to validate everyday experiences through the distillation and expansion process of song and dance. Where most critics try to point to the musical as escapism, Jackson is more astute:

"the musical has a universal appeal far beyond mere escapism, the excuse generally given, however condescendingly for the success of this type of entertainment."¹⁰

Its universal appeal lies in the capacity of song and dance to function dramatically free from the constraints of verbal language. In addition:

"the appeal of the stage musical to a wide cross-section of the public owes not a little to the fact that this is the most eclectic form of stagecraft, adapting to its own needs popular literature and the classics, classical music and rock, jazz and operetta, ballet and tap, the history of the past and the world of the future. It cannibalises its own world of show business, absorbing alike the big dramatic play or the venerable Hollywood movie... Most importantly, the musical no less than any other form of drama can reflect the contemporary scene, and sometimes even manages to make a social comment on the world around it."¹¹

Due to the close relationship between the musical and its audience in what Clive Barnes describes as, "wish-creation"¹² it perhaps reflects more truly the evolving socio-cultural context from which it emerges than any other form of drama, and no matter how trite they may sometimes seem, shows which sustain their appeal to an audience for a long run cannot be overlooked as reflective of public needs and values. In that sense the interplay between the musical's function and its content is vital, and thus a history of the musical in all its aspects, ideologically, stylistically and culturally will provide a reflective picture of socio-cultural development of the society from which each show springs. In that sense at least, the musical can be seen as a kind of mirror and as reflective of cultural tendencies as any other art.

In that light, it is possible to identify the American musical as a separate entity, one which has a

specific stylistic quality to it and one which is part of the broad pattern of the musical's reflection of developing socio-cultural ideas and trends in America.

Stylistically, as in all musical theatre, one notes a combination of classic and colloquial styles and vocabularies in terms of all four of the media employed. Most crucially, as far as song and dance are concerned, in America this meant the influence of jazz upon more traditional musico-dramatic forms. WEST SIDE STORY in particular utilises this influence in creating its own language. Also the ethnicity of voice appropriate to subject is a crucial factor, combining the musical dramatist's own voice with the cultural perceptions of the audience about the musical's setting. Jerry Herman creates a feeling of middle-America and traditional values through the use of two specific styles - one is the traditional ballad, fifties style, which is reassuring, and one of which is in the style of the marching bands which suggest celebration and community. Both are crucial to his appeal and to his choice of subject matter, so that even wheeler-dealers like Dolly Levi, and eccentrics like Auntie Mame, or the Queens of LA CAGE AUX FOLLES can be seen as comforting and reassuring to middle-class values. Sondheim on the other hand has a dazzling array of classical technique

and colloquial styles at his command - that is part of his genius - yet though he may be considered the artistic Midas of the modern musical, he has never been truly popular. His adherence to the principles of the Book as the seed of style has not allowed for his own individual voice to come through so clearly and in so reassuring a fashion as that of Herman, say, or Kander and Ebb. Interestingly, Sondheim himself believes that the musical is no longer a popular form, but in fact a very esoteric one, though his definition of popular seems to be rooted in a numerical equation.¹³ There may be some argument for his view as we shall see, but what is true here, is that his work has not been so readily appealing as that of most of his contemporaries who choose to develop a consciously 'popular' style.

More interestingly though than individual styles as reflective of the cultural background of musicals, is a chronological survey of developing themes through examining specific shows. Since so little research has been done on audience expectation of the musical and its fulfilment or otherwise, much of the connection we might make between theme and function is bound to be speculative, yet is still, I believe, an important and revealing one to undertake, linking as it does shows which have evidently influenced the form of the musical as a whole with significant socio-cultural events and shifts of attitude.

Certainly, prior to 1957, as emphasis grew upon the Book in the musical, the predominant strain was one of individualism, in line with America's broad based philosophy as embodied in the Constitution, supposedly equal opportunity for all through freedom of creed, speech and property. The Rodgers and Hammerstein shows of the '40s and '50s are fine examples of such a philosophy. Moral values triumph and the central individual protagonist is drawn as all-conquering hero in the face of any adversity. The Pioneer spirit of America was alive and well. In spite of the 'thirties Depression era and its involvement in two World Wars, America still needed to reassert those basic tenets of her national philosophy, almost as justification for the sufferings of those times. Certainly America, in spite of those hardships, had emerged as one of the leading world powers after the Second World War, and for a decade at least, bloomed with a self-confidence that seemed unshakeable.

When WEST SIDE STORY opened however in 1957, it laid bare the myth of solidity and harmony within the American psyche, for here was a show about racial tensions leading to death right in the heart of American cities. Still however, in spite of a social realism creeping into the musical, it is the individualism of

Tony and Maria which wins out in the end and holds out hope for change, even though the cost is Tony's life. Likewise in GYPSY (1958) individualism is again questioned for it does not provide equal opportunity for all. In the end, Rose has fought to make opportunities for her children as society demands, she thinks, and finds herself having been denied her chance:

"Someone tell me when is it my turn?
Don't I get a dream for myself?"

The truth behind the myth of individualism is of course that it's not all roses. Not everybody does get their own dream.

Yet the dream lived on in CAMELOT, despite its darker tone, and it is no surprise to learn that this was John F. Kennedy's favourite show! In 1964, HELLO DOLLY was the individual restored in the old vein, but Kennedy was dead, brutally assassinated and America was beginning to question its own faith in the Dream. ANYONE CAN WHISTLE in the same year, although too stylistically abrasive for its own survival, struck at the very heart of traditional values. The American musical would never be the same again. By the time of HAIR (1968), the public didn't want it to be. Everything about this show was a reaction to the old school traditions of CAMELOT. Ideas, form, content,

method and audience were all new, ensuring the show a significant place in the musical's history in spite of its inherent weaknesses of craft.

The '70s arrived and with COMPANY ushered in a decade of shows which were to question and re-evaluate many of the basic values of the American system, and with the addition of rock music to the musical theatre, they were able to do so in a more abrasive fashion. Overall, the tone of shows was to become darker, more disillusioned with traditional forms, humour was to become more ironic and slickness of presentation to suggest superficiality. COMPANY tore at marriage and the family, re-evaluating the moral basis for interpersonal relationships, FOLLIES (1971) exploded the follies of individualism in a kind of musical Walpurgisnacht, and advertised it with the face of the Statue of Liberty split in two. The facade of the American Dream was well and truly cracked. CHICAGO in 1975 and A CHORUS LINE in the same year gave bitter commentary on the manipulation of the Dream to dominate individuals instead of freeing them. CHICAGO's dazzling veneer hides murder and corruption at every turn, little wonder in a country that was rocked by the Watergate scandal and the undermining of its highest office of President by political corruption. IN PACIFIC OVERTURES (1976), we see how individualism becomes the excuse for

tyrannical imperialism. Clearly the social system of the Dream and the actual lives of the individuals in the society were not the same thing. WORKING in 1978 bore testament to the lives of individuals who had been subjugate to the system. The whole tone of the decade in America was summarised in the angry, apocalyptic cries of SWEENEY TODD in 1979 where all social systems are corrupt and unjust, and where the individual appears futile in attempts to change them.

Given such a deep-rooted questioning of all that had gone before, the early 'eighties strove to cover over the deep rifts and to shore up the myth of individualism triumphant. By producing shows such as DREAMGIRLS and LA CAGE AUX FOLLES the musical tried to launder minority identities outside the system and make them acceptable within it. A new and insidious form of liberal individualism had arrived with the Reagan era, and it was as false as the old individualism.

SUNDAY IN THE PARK WITH GEORGE (1984) portrayed the difficulties of sustaining true individualism of thought and vision against the pressures of a set system, and INTO THE WOODS (1987) tries to bring individualism back in line by saying that it is only feasible if it is subjugated to a sense of collective social responsibility.

Although this brief outline is hardly an in-depth study of each show in relation to the exact attitudes of its period, what is intended to be shown is the broader shifting lines of the musical's changing themes as reflective of broader social changes. There is much more specific work to be done in this field with regard to socio-political and cultural evaluations of individual shows, particularly if it can be tied to research concerned with audience expectation and response.

Apart from Sondheim's work in America, most musical dramatists at present seem to have little idea of any specific function they have with regard to the shifting values of their audience. If Broadway, as seems to be the case, has been dominated by British imports, especially in the field of the musical, traditionally Broadway's home-grown strength, then it is possibly because the tradition of individualism has emerged more fully fledged and truly expressed in the British musicals of the past decade than in the U.S.

Sondheim, referring specifically to the crafting of musical theatre, sees no significant shows having emerged from the U.K. in the past hundred years, since the time of Gilbert and Sullivan.¹⁴ Though in some ways this is true, it is also a somewhat silly statement in

light of what might best be described as the Andrew Lloyd-Webber phenomenon. And phenomenon it is too, since stylistically, Lloyd-Webber's work combines elements of Puccini, the English cathedral tradition of choral singing, classical music, the Beatles and '60s British pop. In that sense he is a truly British writer of musicals. The only other significant musicals of the set period prior to Lloyd-Webber's emergence were those of Lionel Bart and the Bricusse/Newley combination which were very much rooted in a combination of the English music-hall with the American musical's showbiz veneer. Almost all the subject matter of this earlier work was class-based. This is hardly to be wondered at when in the non-musical theatre from 1956 onwards, drama had begun to address itself to working-class figures as central protagonists and to the rising middle-classes with education. The Angry Young Men of drama and the Kitchen Sink setting were reflected in some of the musical shows of Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop with whom Bart worked initially. British obsessions with class were at the heart of the British musical. Only with the emergence of Lloyd-Webber did a true individualism begin to emerge in line with the first signs of the socio-political shifts which were to dominate British culture in the '80s.

JOSEPH AND THE AMAZING TECHNICOLOR DREAMCOAT and JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR were both seen as fresh in the British musical scene due to their base in rock and pop music, making them accessible to a younger audience than that drawn traditionally to the American dominated musicals of the West End. Indeed, JOSEPH had been originally written for performances in schools.

By 1978 with the production of EVITA, it is no coincidence that the Cinderella story behind the casting of the rôle and its subject of a woman's rise to power, reflected the assumption of the Tory Party leadership by Margaret Thatcher and her subsequent election victory in 1979. Her policies centred upon a new individualism and a new enterprise, and Lloyd-Webber's success was a perfect example of the entrepreneurial spirit, not least when he became his own producer and then launched his production company on the stock exchange. Nor is it coincidence that Lloyd-Webber came to write the music for Thatcher's second re-election campaign. The shows CATS and STARLIGHT EXPRESS both portray in simplistic terms the concept of individualism triumphant, almost as if they were celebratory court masques of the Jacobean/Elizabethan era, not musicals of the twentieth century. As pageants alone, they held an enormous appeal for audiences who wanted to have their faith in the new individualism reaffirmed.

CHESS on the other hand went completely against the prevailing spirit of enterprise, portraying individuals merely as pawns within a broader political game. Although the show had a respectable run in line with a new found confidence in the U.K.'s ability to produce good new musicals, it nevertheless was on sticky ideological ground for most of its audience, neither pro-individualism, nor pro-class-based socialism, the traditional cry of the left in the U.K. Audiences were on much happier ground with BLOOD BROTHERS by Willy Russell, a playwright who turned his hand to writing all aspects of this musical, which while ambitious in intent, is so completely one-sided in its drawing of class-based characters that all integrity is lost. In spite of its class-rooted story, it was nevertheless a tale of individualism beaten down by a class-based system, and in that strove for its tragedy.

The recent lack of attention paid to ASPECTS OF LOVE by critics and awards seems odd in the sense that Lloyd-Webber's individualism here is tempered and begins to take on a more human face, placing his characters in at least some kind of real social context, even if it is insufferably privileged and self-indulgent. Nevertheless, the epic sweep of LES MISERABLES had already won over British audiences to the potent mix of

an under-privileged hero fighting tyranny in the system, set in the context of revolution, romance, idealism and religious fervour. Given sweeping melodies and huge sets, the audience were likely to be drawn to such epic scale, especially given that here individualism had a true enemy. With MISS SAIGON, the same team have once again tapped audience needs. Both the central protagonists are involved in a war situation, about which they feel uncomfortable, to say the least. Both are led by senses of honour to actions - Chris to obey his nation, his system, Miss Saigon to deny hers, to kill her brother and to take the consequences. The tragic implication of the show is that when individualism follows its own logical path it will be destroyed by the systems. Individualism within the system can only produce the guilt with which Chris struggles to live. The only real way forward it implies, is for individualism to be the system! How audiences in America will respond to this is anyone's guess, though as already pointed out, the show fails to hammer home the ideological implications of American guilt and ends up celebrating what it seems to set out to criticise. If it did not, it might find great difficulty in playing in America.

Of course, in both cultures, and in others too, where musicals are a significant part of cultural

provision, though they may attract a large percentage of theatre audiences, theatre itself is no longer a popular form in terms of mass accessibility. Hal Prince points out certain facets of cultural development which have affected our perceptions of musical theatre.¹⁵

Firstly he acknowledges the way in which television has come to dominate our culture as the truly popular medium. This has several ramifications:

- i) a shorter attention span
- ii) a raising of decibel levels
- iii) a non-communal tendency in audience habits
- iv) a tendency to spoon-feed passive audiences
- vi) a reliance on action, producing a predominantly visual rather than aural perception.

Current musical theatre artists must address all these implications if they are to meaningfully communicate with a modern audience and not some imagined audience based on nostalgic perceptions of theatre-going.

Certainly in the U.S. the musical's recent troubles have been as much rooted in its failure to meet with its audience as in any aspect of craft, which is as strong as ever. Of much more concern to artists now is 'where do we get the show on?' rather than 'how do we make it?'

One of the more striking aspects of the Lloyd-Webber phenomenon and the subsequent blossoming of musical theatre activity in the U.K., is how the shows have been able to capture mass public awareness, such that most new shows, and certainly Lloyd-Webber's own, are sold out for months in advance almost immediately booking opens. There are several reasons why this is the case, though some remain purely speculative.

Firstly, musicals in the U.K. have retained a link with the pop music charts that hasn't happened in America. Lloyd-Webber's shows and those of others (David Essex's MUTINY for example), were introduced into public perception through records months before the shows were due to be staged.

Secondly, the shows serve a function in line with the current thoughts and trends in broader socio-political arenas, so are affirmations of experience in that sense.

Thirdly, they serve as a link between the audience's desire for transcendence and a sense of event or thrill, almost as a kind of respectable drug-taking, hence the popularity of the 'pageant' shows such as CATS, STARLIGHT EXPRESS or TIME which have little dramatic content per se, but which are consistently sold-out.

Fourthly, they serve a kind of religioso function, for many of their audience for whom more formalised religion has ceased to have meaning or place within their social structures. The heightened plane of emotion of the musical and its broad idealism gives audiences a sense of transcendence akin to a kind of religious spirituality. This is particularly noticeable in the popularity of those songs from musicals which have an anthem-like quality - 'Don't Cry For Me Argentina' from EVITA, 'Memory' from CATS, 'Anthem' itself from CHESS and many more.

Let me re-emphasise that much of this is speculative, since there is currently no recorded evidence available, and thorough research into this area would have taken up the whole of this study by itself, yet it is undoubtedly an area that should be researched further and fully if we are to truly understand the musical's appeal and its function.

Its constant appeal however, is its tantalising promise; its suggestion of the possibility of those unique moments of theatrical excitement and dramatic thrill that we associate with the musical theatre. It is that promise that keeps the audience hopeful and waiting for the next special experience that the musical can offer us.

Perhaps the best insight into the function of the musical that we do have comes from the following selection of quotes from musical dramatists themselves, who between them seem to have been successful at providing shows which have entertained and satisfied audiences during the set period of this study.¹⁶

Burt Bacharach: "I like musicals that entertain, that make people feel a sense of well-being on leaving the theatre, having had a good time."¹⁷

Leonard Bernstein: "The musical is best when it is 'simple and appealing.'¹⁸

Fred Ebb: "I don't want to work anymore without passion. Passion is the most important thing."¹⁹

Carol Hall: "I only like to write songs about survival and going on."²⁰

Marvin Hamlisch: "The essence of a show's success to me is what the stomach feels like and the heart. It's a goose-pimple feeling."²¹

Sheldon Harnick: "What moves me terribly - is when one person does a kindness to another. More and more I hope that people watching will see that in my work, and have their beliefs confirmed - that loving kindness is important and can make life richer."²²

John Kander: "I've never thought of this before, but I'd like to be remembered as a stirrer of emotions - feelings that don't just wash over you and do nothing."²³

Carole Bayer Sager: "I sustain myself through the belief that I'm doing what I'm supposed to be doing; the belief that good things eventually find their way. The joy of doing."²⁴

Charles Strouse: "I write about the triumph of life over death... so, 'The sun'll come out tomorrow.'"²⁵

All their views and no doubt the views of many others - artists, critics and audiences alike - reflect the instinct that the musical theatre contains something special - something indefinable - even as this study has set out to try to define it. Yet its optimism, its faith, its life-affirming qualities are all part of its mystery, its magic its virtual reality - our musical theatre rainbow.

If the musical theatre has any future at all it is because it has a function that is crucial to the sustaining of the human spirit. Who knows what form the future of the musical theatre will take? Certainly its range and variation in the next thirty years will be at least as surprising and large as that of the last thirty years - which in so many ways has sought to both challenge and build on the traditions of the past. Such a process is part of the inevitable process of regeneration. Yet in order for it to be secure, the musical theatre must look towards more awareness of its own deficiencies in terms of training particularly, and

remedy the situation where purely commercial considerations are restricting artistic development of both individuals and the form as a whole. Most importantly, the musical theatre must stake its claim as an art to be taken seriously by the theatre as a whole and by other art forms, not to be casually dismissed as mere entertainment. Only then will it be able to say that it has truly come of age and to fulfil its function in the modern world.

Its function however, will remain the same - to provide an answer to the eternal question of the human spirit:

"If happy little bluebirds fly...
beyond the rainbow; why, oh why, can't I?"

In the world of the musical theatre, we can.

CHAPTER 9

FOOTNOTES.

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APPENDIX A

THE SUB-GENRES OF PAUL J. HUSTOLES.

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THE SUB-GENRES OF PAUL J. HUSTOLES.

Hustoles' work is particularly useful in breaking down the usual confusion of thought among other analysts who in general attempt to look for features common to all musicals. As this study sets out to show, the common features of musical theatre are rooted in the usage of music and dance focused on the actor through the essential convention of song. As convention is fashioned to the particular demands of the dramatic idea in the Book, and as style grows in accordance with that fashioning, so arise identifiable and distinct features particular to different musical theatre genres.

The delineation of Hustoles' genre are repeated here, along with the names of the three archetypes he uses in his examination of the work for specific standard features. Some of these shows are from outside the period of this study, but most are well-known and have been included for completeness. The other shows listed are those from the period of this study.

The major categorisations are as follows:

Musical Comedy

including Musical Comedy

Musical Farce

Musical Comedy of Manners

Musical Drama

including Musical Drama

Musical Melodrama

Musical Romance

Musical Revue

Each category is outlined on a separate page.

Musical Comedy

3 archetypes:	ANNIE GET YOUR GUN	(1946)
	KISS ME KATE	(1948)
	THE MUSIC MAN	(1957)

Standard Features of Musical Comedy

1. There is a happy ending.
2. There is an effusive humorous atmosphere.
3. There is a romantic complication with the leading couple.
4. There is sentimentality.
5. There are plot obstacles.
6. There are blocking characters.
7. There is a socialisation process, a shift towards sensibility.
8. There is an evocation of sympathy.
9. There is ridicule.
10. It is representational.
11. The first song is a musical scene.
12. The first song of the second act is a chorus number.
13. Dances serve to decorate and intensify rather than further the plot.
14. The finale is a choral number.
15. There will be at least one 'showstopping' number.
16. There is a chorus used to intensify musical numbers, for spectacle and for atmosphere.

Variables

1. The first act finale is a choral number.
2. There is a romantically involved couple in a supporting rôle.
3. Children are often in featured rôles.
4. Villains are not evil; usually they are ridiculous.

Other Musical Comedies

It is interesting to note that there have been few shows in this category during the period of this study, except revivals.

The first two archetypes have both received recent revivals as have Rodgers and Harts' BABES IN ARMS and ON YOUR TOES. Likewise, Porter's ANYTHING GOES and Loesser's GUYS AND DOLLS.

Other musical comedies include HOW TO SUCCEED IN BUSINESS WITHOUT REALLY TRYING by Loesser, PROMISES, PROMISES by David and Bacharach, BELLS ARE RINGING by Styne, Comden & Green.

Musical Farce

3 Archetypes:	A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE FORUM	(1962)
	GREASE	(1972)
	LITTLE MARY SUNSHINE	(1959)

Standard Features of Musical Farce

1. The plot follows contrivance and convolutions that are theatrically credible and lead to a happy ending.
2. There is an effusive atmosphere of absurdity of situation.
3. Sentimentality is intellectually lampooned.
4. The plot is very simple made complicated.
5. The characters are recognisable types.
6. The society is tolerant but remains stable and conservative.
7. There is ridicule.
8. It is presentational.
9. Affectionate parody and nostalgia are elemental.
10. It is marked by intelligence and wit.
11. Dances serve to decorate and intensify rather than further the plot.
12. The finale is a choral number.
13. The chorus is often made up of named characters and it is used not only for amplification and decoration, but also for plot advancement.
14. It is risquè.
15. The action is very fast; the performance style is physical.

Variables

1. Romantic entanglements are used as a plot device.
2. The first song of the play is a musical scene.
3. The first song of the second act is a choral number.
4. The first act finale is a choral number.
5. There is a romantically involved couple in a supporting rôle.

Other Musical Farces

There are far more Musical Farces than Musical Comedies in the period of this study. The category includes shows rooted in the idea of pastiche , such as THE BOYFRIEND, DAMES AT SEA and THE GREAT AMERICAN BACKSTAGE MUSICAL as well as those whose aim is consciously satirical - CANDIDE, BYE BYE BIRDIE and THE ROCKY HORROR SHOW (consciously parodic). Rock music shows often fall into this category, such as TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA or YOUR OWN THING, both based on Shakespearian comedy, and THE WIZ. The larger-than-life quality of Musical Farce has encouraged writers to choose subjects of larger-than-life characters such as BARNUM or cartoon characters such as L'IL ABNER. One of the finest recent examples of the Musical Farce is LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS, featuring the ever-growing larger-than-life carnivorous plant Audrey II.

Musical Comedy Of Manners

3 archetypes:	A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC	(1973)
	HELLO DOLLY!	(1964)
	MY FAIR LADY	(1956)

Standard Features of Musical Comedy of Manners

1. Plot allows for logical but complicated intrigue on its way to a reserved happy ending.
2. Society's manners and style dictate and influence the action.
3. There must be a romantic complication with the leading couple.
4. Sentimentalism is ridiculed, but acceptable if tempered by intelligence.
5. There must be ridicule.
6. Society is both the subject of ridicule and of manipulation by the leading character.
7. There is evocation of sympathy.
8. It is primarily representational with many presentational moments.
9. There is intelligence and wit.
10. Dances serve to intensify rather than further the plot.
11. The finale is not a choral number.
12. There is a chorus used to intensify musical numbers, for spectacle and for atmosphere.
13. There is a romantically involved couple in a supporting rôle.
14. There is at least one 'showstopping' number.
15. The action takes place at a leisurely pace.

Variables

1. It can be risqué, though not necessarily so.
2. The first number of the second act is a musical scene.
3. The first act ends with a choral number.

Other Musical Comedies of Manners

Again, as with Musical Farce, there are more Musical Comedies of Manners in this period than Musical

Comedies, though not as many in number as Musical Farces.

Jerry Herman's work in particular focuses on this category, with MAME and LA CAGE AUX FOLLES falling here along with HELLO DOLLY! Also, Stephen Sondheim's work has used this form in COMPANY and, debatably, PACIFIC OVERTURES, together with A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC. NINE is also in this category as is ANNIE, based on the famous cartoon, not as one might expect in the category of Musical Farce.

Musical Drama

3 Archetypes:	GYPSY	(1959)
	OKLAHOMA!	(1943)
	1776	(1969)

Standard Features of Musical Drama

1. There is a simple or complex plot that is resolved with a reserved but happy ending.
2. The tone is prevailingly serious, although there are comedic moments.
3. The leading character is romantically involved, although the involvement needn't be resolved happily.
4. There is deep and broad sentiment.
5. The plot is defined by conflict.
6. Characters are psychologically realistic.
7. It is primarily representational, with several presentational moments.
8. Dance serves as a device for important plot and/or character development, and to decorate and intensify.
9. It is musically balanced, importance going to every type of song.
10. The emphasis is on the characters.
11. All song forms are used for character psychological revelation.
12. The second act begins with a choral number.
13. The finale is not a choral number.
14. The chorus is often made up of named characters and is used not only for decoration but for plot advancement.
15. There is a romantically involved couple in a supporting rôle.

Variables

1. The first song is a musical scene.
2. The first act ends with a choral number.
3. There are star speciality numbers.
4. There is often understandable villainy.

Other Musical Dramas

As with Musical Comedy, many of the best examples of Musical Drama come from pre-1957, but as a basis of 'serious comedy', Musical Drama has retained a vital importance in the development of Musical Theatre.

In 1963, SHE LOVES ME opened on Broadway, and remains one of the finest examples of musical theatre where the emphasis is on song as revelation of character. CABARET, too falls into this category, as do the following shows: DO I HEAR A WALTZ, THE MOST HAPPY FELLA (if not atypical), MILK AND HONEY, FIORELLO!, PAINT YOUR WAGON, CARNIVAL, THE FANTASTICKS and A CHORUS LINE.

Musical Melodrama

3 archetypes:	FIDDLER ON THE ROOF	(1964)
	THE KING AND I	(1951)
	WEST SIDE STORY	(1957)

Standard Features of Musical Melodrama

1. Simple plot which leads to a pathetic resolution.
2. Tone is prevailingly serious. Humour is reserved and limited.
3. The leading character is romantically involved, though this need not be resolved happily.
4. Deep and broad sentiment.
5. Overt emotionalism, dealing with both rational and irrational fear.
6. Evocation of sympathy.
7. Plot defined by heightened conflict between forces over which the protagonist has no control.
8. Characters are psychologically realistic.
9. Primarily representational, but contains many important moments of presentationalism.
10. Dance serves as an essential plot and character development device, in addition to intensifying and decorating the entire play.
11. There is an important moralistic theme motivating the dramatic action.
12. There are many theatrical effects, both dramatic and spectacular.
13. It is musically balanced, but with little emphasis upon comedy numbers.
14. Emphasis is on character.
15. All song forms are used for psychological character revelation.
16. Finale is not a choral number.
17. The chorus is often made up of named characters and is used for decoration and plot advancement.
18. A romantically involved couple are in a supporting rôle.
19. There is no 'show-stopping' number.
20. Principal characters usually have a confidant.

Variables

1. The first song is a musical scene.
2. The first act ends with a choral number.
3. The second act begins with a choral number.

Other Musical Melodramas

The list here is reasonably full for the period between 1957 and 1987 including as it does, THE SOUND OF MUSIC, ZORBA, and interestingly, the British born musicals, OLIVER!, EVITA and THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA.

Musical Romance

3 Archetypes	CAMELOT	(1961)
	MAN OF LA MANCHA	(1965)
	SWEENEY TODD	(1978)

Standard Features of Musical Romance

1. The plot follows an adventurous quest that finds some triumph within general despair.
2. The tone is prevailingly serious. Humour can be present, but is limited and tends toward the absurd.
3. The leading character is romantically involved, but in an essentially platonic way.
4. An evocation of both pity and fear.
5. The plot is defined by a major conflict that results in catastrophe, and by internal and external dualities involving the protagonist.
6. Characters are psychologically realistic.
7. It is presentational.
8. It is marked by idealism.
9. Dance has little or no importance.
10. It is filled with the grotesque.
11. It is set in a distant time and removed location.
12. There is emphasis on character.
13. All song forms are used for psychological character revelation.
14. The first act ends with a non-choral number.
15. The finale is a choral number.
16. There is a chorus used for decoration intensification and atmosphere.
17. There are no 'show-stopping' numbers.
18. Principal characters have a confidant.
19. It demands a relatively high degree of vocal competence.

Variables

1. The first number of the show is a non-choral number.
2. There is a romantically involved couple in a supporting rôle.

Other Musical Romances

In most respects this is the most specific of the genres identified and one which has only come to be identifiable since the Rodgers and Hammerstein show CAROUSEL. The most significant exponent of this genre in the period of this study is Stephen Sondheim whose more recent shows have become more and more rooted in an idealism and whose ability to combine the dark with a vision of perfection has resulted not only in SWEENEY TODD, but also SUNDAY IN THE PARK WITH GEORGE, INTO THE WOODS and again, for we can argue the case, PACIFIC OVERTURES. Apart from these shows, there are far less examples of the Musical Romance than of other forms, and it may well be the genre which is most open to further development and exploration.

Musical Revue

3 archetypes:	CHICAGO	(1975)
	HAIR	(1969)
	PIPPIN	(1972)

Standard Features of Musical Revue

1. There is a very thin plot.
2. There are 'show-stopping' numbers.
3. There are many self-contained moments to add variety.
4. There is burlesque.
5. There is an emphasis on human spectacle.
6. There is an emphasis on dance.
7. It is presentational.
8. It is risquè.
9. Characterisation is shallow.
10. It begins with a full chorus number.
11. The first act ends with a choral number.
12. There is a chorus used to intensify, for spectacle and for atmosphere.
13. There is an emphasis on humour.
14. The pace of the action is brisk.

Variables

1. The second act begins with a musical number.
2. The finale is not a choral number.

Other Musical Revues

This category is a convenient one for Hustoles, mopping up all the shows that do not fall into the other six identifiable genres, and in one sense is the least 'dramatic' and the most 'theatrical', hence its close association with the definition of Revue outlined in Chapter One.

And yet there are really two groupings of Musical Revue. The three archetypes along with the 'pageant' shows of Andrew Lloyd-Webber such as JOSEPH AND THE AMAZING TECHNICOLLOUR DREAMCOAT, CATS, STARLIGHT EXPRESS, and even JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR belong to a category that does utilise the idea of plot in terms of narrative, however slight.

The other grouping includes BUBBLING BROWN SUGAR, AIN'T MISBEHAVIN', COWARDY CUSTARD, SIDE BY SIDE BY SONDHEIM, TOMFOOLERY, SOPHISTICATED LADIES, RUNAWAYS, FROM BERLIN TO BROADWAY, SUGAR BABIES and more, all of which are revues in a truer sense, based usually upon a particular style of music or on the work of a particular musical dramatist. These shows link their material thematically rather than according to narrative, and yet follow the principles of synthesis in obeying the demands of rhythmic line.

Interestingly, the latter grouping has provided many examples in the last twenty years, not least due to the relatively cheap cost of the smaller Musical Revue in the face of spiralling costs of other Musical Theatre forms. In addition, with all the financial risks involved, collections of tried and tested material are more likely to attract audiences, as producers think. And yet, the former category is really the more interesting development in terms of Musical Revue.

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For a discography see either Ganzl or Raymond.