



What Is A Musical?

The musical, in all its various forms, is very much a living art form. Our goal is to see how the musical has developed over the last few centuries on stage and screen, to assess where it currently stands, and to finally make some educated guesses as to where it may be headed in years to come, especially after the pandemic. Let's start with a basic definition:

musical (noun): a stage, television or film production using popular-style songs - dialogue is optional - to either tell a story (book musicals) or showcase the talents of the writers and/or performers (revues).

Book musicals have gone by many names: **comic operas, operettas, opera bouffe, burlesque, burletta, extravaganza** and **musical comedy**.

Revues have their roots in **variety, vaudeville, music halls** and **minstrel shows**.

The best musicals have three essential qualities –

Brains – intelligence and style

Heart – genuine and believable emotion

Courage – the guts to do something creative and exciting.

(a cue to remember these qualities is *The Wizard of Oz*, a 1939 musical film production!)

One has to only look at the popularity of the WICKED production or GREASE, RENT, LES MISERABLES and many others to know that audiences of all ages attend and are entertained by these musical theatre productions. Of course, quality is no guarantee of commercial success. However, musicals with these qualities are more likely to stand the test of time.

I believe that a great musical is a great musical, no matter what its point of origin. Those created for the large or small screen are no less interesting than those written for the stage. So whether we are discussing *Astaire & Rogers or *Rodgers & Hammerstein, we are still considering the musical at its best.

Today, we have two categories of musical theatre: **Golden Age**, which would include productions prior to 1969 such as those starring Astaire & Rogers and written by Rodgers & Hammerstein (Oklahoma, Annie Get Your Gun, South Pacific, Carousel and others such as The Music Man and Guys & Dolls); and **Contemporary**, which began with the introduction of the mega-musicals that were created after 1969, such as Cats, Joseph & the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat, PHANTOM of the Opera, Les Miserables, Miss Siagon, Hair Spray, Wicked, Rent, and Spring Awakening.

However, the strength of some musical theatre performances vary, with emphasis shifting between the singing and the dancing. The musical screen production of **Dirty Dancing** has no

singing but there is lots of **dancing**. Yet, other contemporary musical theatre productions like **The PHANTOM of the Opera** or **Les Miserables** emphasizes the singing with dance or movement minimal with the vocals. Therefore, there are three types of musical performances: those that focus on the dancing; those that focus on the singing; and, those with equal demands of singing and dancing. However, that said, all musicals require the musical performances to tell the story and further the plotline. Therefore, you can not make a musical into a drama or comedy production as the plotline is carried through the musical performances.

*noted below in the assignment

VOCABULARY

A **Choreographer** designs and directs the dance or stylized movement in **musical** productions, working closely with the director and **musical** director. A **choreographer** works with dancers to interpret the story in the lyrics and music and then develop ideas to transform them into the finished performance.

Musical

Book musicals

Comic Operas

Operettas

Opera Bouffe

Burlesque

Burletta

Extravaganza

Musical Comedy.

Revues

Variety

Vaudeville

Music Halls

Minstrel Shows

Famous dancers/choreographers:

1. Who are Fred Astaire (1899-1987) and Ginger Rogers (1911-1995)? What was their relationship to each other and how did they influence the musical theatre industry
2. Who are Richard Rodgers (1902-1979) and Oscar Hammerstein II (1895-1960) and what was their relationship to each other and how did they influence the musical theatre industry?
3. Who is Bob Fosse (1927-1987) and what was his influence in the musical theatre industry?

4. Choose five (5) of the following Canadians and explain their backgrounds and their influence on Musical Theatre in Canada: Brian Macdonald, David Earle, Allen Kaeja, Stacey Tookey, Alan Lund, Shawn Byfield, Onna White, Nico Arhambault, Donna Feore, and Sergio Trujillo.

5. Choose five (5) of the following Americans and explain their backgrounds and their influence on Musical Theatre on Broadway: Agnes de Mille, Jerome Robbins, Michael Bennett, Gower Champion, George Faison, Bill T. Jones, Michael Kidd, Kathleen Marshall, Jerry Mitchell, Susan Stroman, and Tommy Tune.

ASSIGNMENT:

Compare two musicals, indicating your favourite musical scene in each production. Explain WHY these are your favourite scenes. In addition, describe how these two musical performances progressed the plot forward from the action/dialogue before this scene and connect it with the action/dialogue after this scene.

MUSICAL PRODUCTION	DIRTY DANCING (Example)	PHANTOM OF THE OPERA (Example)
Identify your favourite scene and musical performance in the production.		
Identify the characteristics of the performance and WHY you enjoyed it the most.		
Describe HOW the plot was advanced during this musical performance. What changes occurred in the relationships of the characters performing in the musical scene?		