


Musicals

Exploring Songs and Music from the Stage



A. What makes up a Musical?		B. What is Musical Theatre?		C. Voices and Voice Types		D. Origins of Musical Theatre	
<p>Every Musical has a:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• LIBRETTO – the overall text including the spoken and sung parts• LYRICS – the words to the song <p>There are different types of song within a Musical including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• ACTION SONGS – which move the plot forward• CHARACTER SONGS – which enable a character to express their feelings and often have LYRICAL MELODIES and are designed enable the singer to “show off” their vocal skills. <p>Within these two types of songs, different song types can be found including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• BALLADS – which are usually slow, romantic and reflective• COMEDY SONGS – which are funny, to the lyrics are very important• PRODUCTION NUMBERS – which involve the full company and are used to show major changes in location or plot, and often open and close ACTS.• RHYTHM SONGS – are driven by energetic rhythmic patterns <p>The singers in Musicals are normally accompanied by a live BAND or ORCHESTRA (which are often ‘hidden from view’ of the audience in the orchestra pit) which are made up of a range of traditional orchestral instruments combined with modern electronic instruments (e.g. electric guitars, synthesisers and keyboards and drum kits) to give a wide variety of sounds and effects to accompany the on-stage action. Sometimes, a particular song from a Musical becomes more famous than others and is often performed “out of context” as a stand-alone number.</p>		<p>Musical theatre combines music, songs, spoken dialogue and dance; also called ‘MUSICALS’, they are usually performed in theatres. Musicals set out to entertain through a combination of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Catchy music in a popular style• SOLO SONGS, DUETS, CHORUSES and ENSEMBLES.• ORCHESTRA or BAND ACCOMPANIMENT• Spoken dialogue• Dance sequences, stage spectacles and magnificent costumes <p>These are held together by the PLOT or STORYLINE which is divided into ACTS and SCENES. A summary or outline of the plot of a Musical is called a SYNOPSIS. Musicals are usually performed in theatres, most famously on Broadway and in the West End of London. “Broadway” is also used as a general term to refer to American Musicals</p>		<p>Various different types of male and female voice are used in both Musicals (and Opera) and are given to different characters.</p> <p>SOPRANO – the highest female voice type and normally plays the most sympathetic roles (sometimes the heroine who is being cheated on!)</p> <p>MEZZO SOPRANO – a lower female voice type (often given the spiciest and juiciest roles – often witches!)</p> <p>ALTO – the lowest female voice type but can also be sang by men (often maids, mothers or grandmothers)</p> <p>TENOR – the highest male voice type (often given to vulnerable men who love too much!)</p> <p>BARITONE – a medium-range male voice type (often given to the hero of the plot)</p> <p>BASS – the lowest male voice type (often given to characters that portray fathers or priests)</p>		<p>Music Theatre originated from OPERA which was entirely sung with no dialogue. Operas contained main/lead characters, minor characters and the CHORUS. Operas are made up of RECITATIVE (a type of sung dialogue), SOLO SONGS (ARIAS), DUETS, ENSEMBLES and CHORUS NUMBERS and often begin with an instrumental introduction called the OVERTURE. An ORATORIO was like an opera but based on a religious or sacred theme and performed without staging or costumes, often in a church. In the late 1800’s, a duo called Gilbert and Sullivan began writing short, COMIC OPERAS designed for everyone – not just the upper classes (<i>Mikado 1885, HMS Pinafore 1878</i>). The 1920’s and 1930’s saw a huge boom in musicals and theatre productions. Theatre, at this time, was one of the main forms of entertainment. This pre-war era was when musicals were beginning to look and sound like the musicals we still have today, but the songs and dance weren’t usually related to the plot or storyline (if there was one!) The “Golden Age” of Musicals lay between 1943-1968 in Britain and America (<i>Annie Get Your Gun – Irving Berlin – 1946; Kiss Me Cate – Cole Porter – 1948</i>). Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II wrote <i>Oklahoma!</i> In 1943 and this was the first musical to combine a PLOT with music and dance which ‘moved the story forward’. From 1970, audiences have seen musicals split into genres and subcategories. Musicals now often address very serious issues and are not just for entertainment (<i>Les Misérables 1980, Miss Saigon 1989</i>) and ROCK MUSICALS (<i>Hair 1967, Grease 1971</i>) contain rock music and were very influenced by popular culture. Andrew Lloyd-Weber has had huge success in Musical Theatre (<i>Phantom of the Opera 1986, Joseph 1968 and many others!</i>). Many Disney films are done in the style of musicals and there are adaptations of films into musicals (<i>The Lion King 1997</i>) as well as musicals based on the career of a group or artist (<i>We Will Rock You, 2002; Mamma Mia 1999</i>). A strong musical tradition still exists in Britain and America and not just on Broadway or in London by everywhere. Film has been greatly influenced by musicals.</p>	
E. The Structure of Songs in Musicals							
<p>Although most musicals use dialogue, there are some Musicals which are THROUGH-COMPOSED which use little or no dialogue and everything is sung. STROPHIC FORM is when the same melody is repeated but with different words <i>e.g. hymns and carols</i>. The opposite of strophic form is THROUGH-COMPOSED where each section of words has a new music or melody and nothing is repeated (no repeated choruses or refrains).</p> <p>Many songs from Musicals use VERSE & CHORUS form. The CHORUS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sets the refrain of the lyrics and often contains the title words• Usually returns several times, always with the same words• Is normally the “catchiest” part of the song and has a MEMORABLE MELODY <p>The VERSE usually has different words, sung to the same music, with each repetition.</p>							
F. The Structure of a Musical							
OVERTURE		CHARACTERS		SONGS		CLIMAX	
<p>Musicals often begin with an OVERTURE – an INSTRUMENTAL piece played by the BAND or ORCHESTRA which “sets the scene” and often contains parts from songs which will occur later in the musical (e.g. a MEDLEY)</p>		<p>Characters are then introduced, and the storyline develops. Musicals contain some spoken dialogue and sometimes dance sequences. INCIDENTAL MUSIC (music played by the band/orchestra alone) is often used for scene or set changes.</p>		<p>Musicals contain a number of different songs – solo songs (CHARACTER SONGS), DUETS, TRIOS, COMPANY/CHORUS or PRODUCTION NUMBERS, ACTION SONGS, BALLADS and COMEDY SONGS.</p>		<p>The high point of the musical often towards the end of the second ACT – which has some sort of dramatic build up and tension often reflected in the music.</p>	
						FINALE	
						<p>A big ending with music, dance and drama. Often the final song of a musical is a CHORUS/COMPANY/PRODUCTION NUMBER which is fast, loud and dramatic. Following the finale, performers take their bows accompanied by the band/orchestra.</p>	