

## Music 2701A: Musical Theatre, Fall 2023

Instructor: Prof. Kristina Baron-Woods

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### Course Description:

This course focuses on the American musical theatre of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries and will involve a survey of the history of the Broadway musical through the study of selected works from the repertoire. We will look at how the different elements of the musical (music, lyrics, book, choreography, and direction) work together to create a performance.

Other questions that we will consider:

How do scholars perceive musicals within a cultural context?

What structural and performance conventions typify the Broadway musical as a genre and how have these conventions changed?

### Learning Objectives:

Students will be expected to achieve a general knowledge of the history of the American musical theatre through lectures, listening and viewing, course readings, and forum discussion. Students will be expected to complete writing assignments using creative thinking and written language skills. Students will also learn to critique performance aspects of theatre and apply this knowledge in a review of a live theatre performance.

### Evaluation:

Mid-term Examination	Tuesday, October 24th, in class time 7 - 9pm	30%
Topic check-in	Tuesday, November 14th	5%
Performance Review	Tuesday, November 28th	25%
Participation	Throughout the term	10%
Final Examination	During final exam period in December*	30%

There is no textbook for this course. Course readings, video examples (via web-links), and musical examples will be available online through the class OWL. Students will need to attend a live musical for the Performance Review. Any musical (amateur, student, professional) will be acceptable. Please plan early to purchase a ticket.

\*DO NOT book holiday travel in December until the confirmed final exam schedule is posted.

## Course Schedule:

- Week 1**      **September 12**      **Introduction to the Course/Elements of Musical Theatre**  
Watch: Andrew Lloyd Webber: *Cats* (the stage musical). Watch video.
- Week 2**      **September 19**      **The Mega Musical**  
Lecture: *Cats*; Schoenberg and Boublil: *Les Misérables*
- Week 3**      **September 26**      **Disney and Other Tales**  
Lecture: Ashman and Mencken: *Beauty and the Beast*; Schwartz: *Wicked*  
Read the article: Stacy Wolf, “Defying Gravity: Queer Convention in the Musical *Wicked*” in *Theatre Journal* Vol. 60/1 (2008). JSTOR database. Discuss article in groups on OWL forum.
- Week 4**      **October 3**      **Classical and Contemporary**  
Lecture: Guettel: *The Light in the Piazza*. Watch video.
- Week 5**      **October 10**      **The Mini Musical: Intimate Affairs**  
Lecture: Brown: *The Last Five Years*; Tesori and Kron: *Fun Home*
- Week 6**      **October 17**      **Sex, Drugs, and Rock Musicals**  
Lecture: Larson: *Rent*. Watch video.
- Week 7**      **October 24**      **Mid-Term Examination**
- Week 8**      **November 7**      **Back to the Beginning: Operetta**  
Lecture: Gilbert and Sullivan: *The Pirates of Penzance*. Watch Act I. Kern: *Show Boat*.
- Week 9**      **November 14**      **The Musical Play**  
Lecture: Rodgers and Hammerstein: *Oklahoma!* Watch video.  
**\*Topic check-in due\***
- Week 10**      **November 21**      **The Golden Era of Broadway**  
Lecture: Loesser: *Guys and Dolls*
- Week 11**      **November 28**      **1957: A Turning Point**  
Lecture: Willson: *The Music Man*; Bernstein and Sondheim: *West Side Story*  
**\*Performance Review due\***
- Week 12**      **December 5**      **Stephen Sondheim**  
Lecture: Sondheim: *Sweeney Todd* and *Sunday in the Park With George*

**Topic check-in (Due Week 9, Tuesday, November 14th, before 11:59pm) 5% of total grade**

Two weeks before your Performance Review is due, you must submit a short comment in paragraph or point form, stating what show you are using for your assignment. In this statement, give the show title, which production (company/date) you are reviewing, and where you attended this production.

Explain what three elements you will be writing about, as per the Performance Review assignment below. Make sure that you are specific. Example: writing that you will focus on the lyrics, the actors' performances, and the costumes will get a comment that you need to be more specific and to resubmit. However, if you write that you will focus on the lyrics to one song that is particularly revealing of the lead character's motives, the vocal and acting performance of that character, and how the costumes depict the class difference between the lead and the ensemble, your check-in will be accepted.

This assignment ensures that you see a show and start work on your review well before the due date, that you are clear about the elements you will be critiquing, and that I can offer assistance if it appears to be needed. Please attach proof of attending a show in the form of a photo of your ticket or the show program with your Topic check-in.

**The Topic check-in should be submitted directly to me via email so that I can respond easily if you need further guidance.**

**Performance Review (Due Week 11, Tuesday, November 28th at 7:00pm) 25% of total grade**

Objective:

To apply what you have learned about musical theatre to a specific production, to think critically about the theatre, and to enhance your own writing skills.

Directions:

Attend any live musical and write a critical review in essay form. Arrive early enough to read the physical or access the online playbill (program) before you attend.

Critique and comment on one element from each of the following three major areas:

1. Text (the immutable elements of a show such as story, music, lyrics, broader themes, etc.)
2. Performance (the elements that could change from one production to another: the direction or director's concept, choreography and movement, the performances of specific actors, etc.)
3. Design (Visual and aural elements like costumes, sets and props, lighting, and sound)

Your review should consider the question "Is this good theatre?" Your review may be positive, negative, or mixed.

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Formatting guidelines:

1300-1400 words in a double-spaced, 12-point standard font (prefer Times New Roman). Include a title page with an interesting title that encapsulates your experience watching this musical; i.e., just the word *Cats* on your title page tells your reader nothing about how you felt about the show. Set your paper up as an essay with an introduction that gives a thesis and states the elements you are critiquing, body paragraphs that detail those elements, and a conclusion. While reading professional reviews from newspapers will help with the tone of your paper, please note that newspaper critics try to cover as much of a production as possible, with very little detail; you are doing the opposite - covering only a few elements in great detail.

**The Performance Review should be printed and submitted at the beginning of class.**

**\*For all assignments: “The 24 Hour Rule” If you are unsure or unhappy about the mark you received on an assignment, please consider your grade and comments for at least 24 hours before initiating any communication protesting or questioning the mark. This gives you time to reflect on the criticisms given by your TA. After the 24-hour mark, I am happy to make an appointment with you to help you understand how your mark was derived.**

### **University and Course Policies**

1. Course Prerequisites: [Music 2701A]. Unless you have either the prerequisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.
2. Grading scale: A+=90-100%, A=80-89%, B=70-79%, C=60-69%, D=50-59%, F=0-49%.
3. Academic Consideration for Student Absence & Missing Work ( $\geq 10\%$ ): Students are responsible for making up any missed classes or assignments as soon as possible. The University recognizes that a student's ability to meet their academic responsibilities may, on occasion, be impaired by medical illness. Illness may be acute (short term), or it may be chronic (long term), or chronic with acute episodes. The University further recognizes that medical situations are deeply personal and respects the need for privacy and confidentiality in these matters. However, in order to ensure fairness and consistency for all students, academic accommodation for work representing 10% or more of the student's overall grade in the course shall be granted only in those cases where there is documentation indicating that the student was seriously affected by illness and could not reasonably be expected to meet their academic responsibilities.

Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Office of the Associate Dean, Undergraduate (TC210), together with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested. Students are directed to read the Senate policy on accommodation for medical illness at the following website for further details regarding requirements and procedures for the supporting documentation:

[https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/accommodation\\_medical.pdf](https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf)

Whenever possible, students who require academic accommodation should provide notification and documentation in advance of due dates, examinations, etc. Students must follow up with their professors and their Academic Counselling office in a timely manner.

4. Academic Consideration for Missing Work (<10%): In cases where students miss work that is worth less than 10% of the total course grade (ie. two or fewer assignments) due to medical illness or compassionate grounds, if documentation is voluntarily submitted to the Associate Dean's office and the Associate Dean grants an accommodation, then the missed assignment(s) or quiz(zes) will be discounted in the calculation of the final grade for the course. If documentation is not voluntarily submitted then the missed assignment(s) will receive a grade of zero. Students who have been denied accommodation by an instructor may appeal this decision to the Associate Dean's office but will be required to present appropriate documentation.

5. Academic Offences: Submission of work with which you have received help from someone else (other than the course instructor or TA) is an example of plagiarism, which is considered a major academic offence. Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, as found at:  
[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_undergrad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf)

6. Mental Health & Wellness: Students that are in emotional/mental distress should refer to the Health and Wellness at Western page (<https://www.uwo.ca/health/>) for a complete list of options about how to obtain help or to go to the Wellness Education Centre located in UCC room 76. **Students in crisis in need of immediate care are directed to go directly to Student Health Services in UC11 or to click on the green "I Need Help Now" button on the Health and Wellness page above.**

7. Accommodation for Students with Disabilities: Students work with Accessible Education Western (AEW, formerly SSD) which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The accommodation policy can be found here:  
[https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/Academic%20Accommodation\\_disabilities.pdf](https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/Academic%20Accommodation_disabilities.pdf)

8. Religious Accommodation: Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give reasonable notice in writing, prior to the holiday, to the Instructor and an Academic Counsellor if their course requirements will be affected by a religious observance. Additional information is given in the Western Multicultural Calendar. <http://multiculturalcalendar.com/ecal/index.php?s=c-univwo>

9. Contingency Plan: Although the intent is for this course to be delivered in-person, the changing COVID-19 restrictions may necessitate some or all of the course to be delivered online, either synchronously (i.e., at the times indicated in the timetable) or asynchronously (e.g., posted on OWL for students to view at their convenience). The grading scheme will not change. Any assessments affected will be conducted online as determined by the course instructor.

10. Gender-Based and Sexual Violence: Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence and providing compassionate support to anyone who has gone through these traumatic events. If you have experienced sexual or gender-based violence, either recently or in the past, you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at [https://www.uwo.ca/health/student\\_support/survivor\\_support/get-help.html](https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html). To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact [support@uwo.ca](mailto:support@uwo.ca) or call 519 661-3568.

11. Electronic Devices in Exams: Electronic devices of any type will not be permitted during the Midterm Test and/or Final Exam in this course (unless required for accessibility reasons based on an approved accommodation request from Accessible Education).