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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

THE MUSICAL THEATER STYLE OF JASON ROBERT BROWN

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Arts

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College of Performing and Visual Arts
School of Music
Wind Conducting

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This Dissertation by: Kathryn Laura Voelker

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ABSTRACT

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Jason Robert Brown is emerging as one of Broadway's top musical theater composers. The majority of musical theater scholarship focuses on extra-musical elements; the only composer who has been examined by the music academy is Stephen Sondheim. Brown has been described as a "disciple" of Sondheim and is on his way to equaling his predecessor's longevity and fame. This study examined the compositional style of Brown and explored his ability to use musical elements to enhance the drama of the musical through his first four productions: *Songs For A New World*, *Parade*, *The Last Five Years*, and *13*. Brown's treatment of song forms and types, rhythmic tendencies, and allusions to various styles are included. Throughout this research, comparisons are made to composers from the Golden Age of musical theater as well as contemporary composers such as Stephen Sondheim and Andrew Lloyd Webber.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION, METHOD, AND SCHOLARSHIP	1
Songs in Musical Theater.....	4
Defining This Study: The Music of Jason Robert Brown.....	5
Selecting the Musicals	7
Definitions.....	7
Four Components of Musical Success	8
Survey of the Literature	13
CHAPTER II. THE HISTORY OF AMERICAN MUSICAL THEATER I: BIRTH—GOLDEN ERA	27
The Golden Era: Oklahoma! and Successors.....	34
Diversity in the Golden Age	41
Golden Age Song Forms and Types	44
CHAPTER III. HISTORY OF AMERICAN MUSICAL THEATER II: POST GOLDEN ERA-PRESENT	48
Andrew Lloyd Webber and the Megamusical	51
Stephen Sondheim and the Concept Musical.....	59
The Concept Musical and the Megamusical—Conclusions	64
The Last Twenty Years	66
Song Forms and Types.....	75
CHAPTER IV. JASON ROBERT BROWN: HIS LIFE AND WORKS.....	79
CHAPTER V. FORM IN JASON ROBERT BROWN’S SONG TYPES	90
Song Types.....	90
Brown’s Solo Song Types	94
Brown’s Duet Song Types.....	111
Comparisons	121

CHAPTER VI. ELEMENTS OF JASON ROBERT BROWN’S RHYTHMIC STYLE WITH COMPARISON TO STEPHEN SONDHEIM	129
Quarter Note Ostinato	132
Minimalist Ideas.....	144
Meter and Text Relationship.....	154
Driving Pulse To “Half-Time Feel”.....	161
Hemiola.....	169
Conclusions.....	177
CHAPTER VII. STYLISTIC ALLUSIONS BY JASON ROBERT BROWN.....	179
Parody	179
Style Allusions.....	186
Sudden Shifts in Style.....	197
Jewish Musical Gestures.....	206
Southern Musical Gestures	213
Conclusions.....	226
CHAPTER VIII. JASON ROBERT BROWN’S MUSICAL STYLE: CONCLUSIONS.....	228
REFERENCES	237
APPENDIX A. SONG LISTS	247
APPENDIX B. SYNOPSES OF THE FOUR MUSICALS	253

LIST OF MUSICAL EXAMPLES

5.1	Stephen Sondheim, <i>Follies</i> , “Waiting for the Girls Upstairs,” mm. 136-139 .	92
5.2	AABA in an extended view	95
5.3	Jason Robert Brown, <i>Songs for a New World</i> , “I’m Not Afraid of Anything,” mm. 27-30	96
5.4	Jason Robert Brown, <i>Songs for a New World</i> , “I’m Not Afraid of Anything,” mm. 53-54	97
5.5	Jason Robert Brown, <i>The Last Five Years</i> , “Shiksa Goddess,” mm. 5-8	98
5.6	Jason Robert Brown, <i>The Last Five Years</i> , “Shiksa Goddess,” mm. 28-34	98
5.7	Jason Robert Brown, <i>Songs For a New World</i> , “King of the World,” mm. 9-11	99
5.8	Jason Robert Brown, <i>Songs For a New World</i> , “King of the World,” mm. 33-35	100
5.9	Stephen Sondheim, <i>Company</i> , “Getting Married Today,” mm. 32-35	101
5.10	Stephen Sondheim, <i>Company</i> , “Getting Married Today,” mm. 52-54	101
5.11	Jason Robert Brown, <i>Songs for a New World</i> , “Stars and the Moon,” mm. 9-12	102
5.12	Jason Robert Brown, <i>Parade</i> , “It’s Hard to Speak My Heart,” mm. 1-4	103
5.13	Jason Robert Brown, <i>The Last Five Years</i> , “The Schmuel Song,” form analysis	109
5.14	Jason Robert Brown, <i>The Last Five Years</i> , “The Schmuel Song,” mm. 112-118	110
5.15	Jason Robert Brown, <i>The Last Five Years</i> , “The Next Ten Minutes,” mm. 59-61	114

5.16	Jason Robert Brown, <i>The Last Five Years</i> , “The Next Ten Minutes,” mm. 71-81	115
5.17	Stephen Sondheim, <i>Into the Woods</i> , “No More,” mm. 110-113.....	117
5.18	Stephen Flaherty and Lynn Ahrens, <i>Ragtime</i> , “Our Children,” mm. 51-54..	118
5.19	Stephen Sondheim, <i>A Little Night Music</i> , “You Must Meet My Wife,” mm. 119-129	120
5.20	Jason Robert Brown, <i>Songs For a New World</i> , “The New World,” mm. 4-12	122
5.21	Jason Robert Brown, <i>The Last Five Years</i> , “Still Hurting,” mm. 1-4.....	123
5.22	Jason Robert Brown, <i>The Last Five Years</i> , “A Part of That,” mm.113-120..	124
6.1	Stephen Sondheim, <i>Into the Woods</i> , “Prologue,” mm. 30-37.....	130
6.2	Jason Robert Brown, <i>Songs for a New World</i> , “A New World,” mm. 18-24	132
6.3	Jason Robert Brown, <i>Songs for a New World</i> , “A New World,” mm. 28-30	133
6.4	Jason Robert Brown, <i>Songs for a New World</i> , “A New World,” mm. 94-96	134
6.5	Jason Robert Brown, <i>The Last Five Years</i> , “A Part of That,” mm. 1-4.....	134
6.6	Jason Robert Brown, <i>The Last Five Years</i> , “A Part of That,” mm. 30-32	135
6.7	Jason Robert Brown, <i>The Last Five Years</i> , “A Summer in Ohio,” mm. 5-8	136
6.8	Jason Robert Brown, <i>The Last Five Years</i> , “A Summer in Ohio,” mm. 9-11	136
6.9	Jason Robert Brown, <i>The Last Five Years</i> , “A Summer in Ohio,” mm. 90-93	137
6.10	Jason Robert Brown, <i>The Last Five Years</i> , “Nobody Needs to Know,” mm. 1-4	138

6.11	Jason Robert Brown, <i>The Last Five Years</i> , “Nobody Needs to Know,” mm. 81-84	139
6.12	Jason Robert Brown, <i>13</i> , “Getting Ready,” mm. 1-6.....	140
6.13	Stephen Sondheim, <i>Into the Woods</i> , “Opening: Part I,” mm. 1-6	141
6.14	Charles Strouse, <i>Annie</i> , “Hard Knock Life,” mm. 15-22.....	142
6.15	Charles Strouse, <i>Annie</i> . “Hooverville,” mm. 2-9	143
6.16	Jason Robert Brown, <i>Songs For A New World</i> , “She Cries,” mm. 1-6	145
6.17	Jason Robert Brown, <i>Parade</i> , “All the Wasted Time,” mm. 1-6.....	146
6.18	Jason Robert Brown, <i>Parade</i> , “All the Wasted Time,” mm. 25-30.....	147
6.19	Jason Robert Brown, <i>Parade</i> , “All the Wasted Time,” mm. 91-96.....	148
6.20	Jason Robert Brown, <i>Parade</i> , “All the Wasted Time,” mm. 116-121.....	149
6.21	Jason Robert Brown, <i>The Last Five Years</i> , “The Next Ten Minutes,” mm. 1-7	150
6.22	Jason Robert Brown, <i>The Last Five Years</i> , “The Next Ten Minutes,” mm. 26-31	151
6.23	Stephen Sondheim, <i>Into the Woods</i> , “Your Fault,” mm. 53-61.....	152
6.24	Jason Robert Brown, <i>13</i> , “Thirteen/Becoming a Man,” mm. 69-76.....	155
6.25	Jason Robert Brown, <i>13</i> , “Get Me What I Need,” mm. 95-102	156
6.26	Jason Robert Brown, <i>The Last Five Years</i> , “The Schmuel Song,” mm. 1-9	157
6.27	Jason Robert Brown, <i>The Last Five Years</i> , “A Part of That,” mm. 1-4.....	158
6.28	Jason Robert Brown, <i>The Last Five Years</i> , “A Part of That,” mm. 5-8.....	159
6.29	Jason Robert Brown, <i>The Last Five Years</i> , “A Part of That,” mm. 20-27	160
6.30	Jason Robert Brown, <i>Songs For a New World</i> , “The New World,” mm. 58-63	162

6.31	Jason Robert Brown, <i>13</i> , “Thirteen/Becoming a Man,” mm. 73-79.....	164
6.32	Jason Robert Brown, <i>13</i> , “Thirteen/Becoming a Man,” mm. 89-101.....	166
6.33	Jason Robert Brown, <i>13</i> , “Thirteen/Becoming a Man,” mm. 99-104.....	167
6.34	Jason Robert Brown, <i>The Last Five Years</i> , “I Can Do Better Than That,” mm. 108-115	168
6.35	Jason Robert Brown, <i>Songs For a New World</i> , “Flagmaker, 1772,” mm. 25-28	170
6.36	Jason Robert Brown, <i>Songs For a New World</i> , “Flagmaker, 1772,” mm. 45-47	171
6.37	Jason Robert Brown, <i>Parade</i> , “All the Wasted Time,” mm. 81-83.....	172
6.38	Jason Robert Brown, <i>The Last Five Years</i> , “I Can Do Better Than That,” mm.124-131	173
6.39	Jason Robert Brown, <i>13</i> , “Get Me What I Need,” mm. 82-87	174
6.40	Stephen Schwartz, <i>Wicked</i> , “For Good,” mm. 25-27	175
6.41	Frank Wildhorn, <i>Jekyll and Hyde</i> , “This is the Moment,” mm. 1-9.....	176
7.1	Jason Robert Brown, <i>Songs For a New World</i> , “Surabaya Santa,” mm. 1-4	181
7.2	John Kander and Fred Ebb <i>Cabaret</i> , “Don’t Tell Mama,” mm. 1-4	181
7.3	Jason Robert Brown, <i>Songs For a New World</i> , “Surabaya Santa,” mm. 131-134	182
7.4	Comparison between “Don’t Tell Mama” and “Surabaya Santa.....	183
7.5	John Kander and Fred Ebb, <i>Cabaret</i> , “Don’t Tell Mama,” mm. 25-31	183
7.6	Jason Robert Brown, <i>Songs For a New World</i> , “Surabaya Santa,” mm. 43-50	184
7.7	The <i>son clave</i> rhythm.....	187
7.8	Jason Robert Brown, <i>Songs For a New World</i> , “King of the World,” mm.1-4	188

7.9	Jason Robert Brown, <i>The Last Five Years</i> , “Moving Too Fast,” mm. 64-69	188
7.10	Jason Robert Brown, <i>The Last Five Years</i> , “Moving Too Fast,” mm. 19-20	189
7.11	Jason Robert Brown, <i>I3</i> , “Brand New You,” mm. 23-28.....	190
7.12	Jason Robert Brown, <i>I3</i> , “Brand New You,” mm. 45-50.....	191
7.13	Jason Robert Brown, <i>I3</i> , “Brand New You,” mm. 57-62.....	192
7.14	Jason Robert Brown, <i>I3</i> , “Brand New You,” mm. 63-66.....	193
7.15	Jason Robert Brown, <i>I3</i> , “Bad, Bad News,” mm 37-39.....	194
7.16	Jason Robert Brown, <i>I3</i> , “Bad, Bad News,” mm. 72-76.....	195
7.17	Jason Robert Brown, <i>I3</i> , “Bad, Bad News,” mm. 48-51	196
7.18	Jason Robert Brown, <i>I3</i> , “All Hail the Brain,” mm. 1-8	197
7.19	Jason Robert Brown, <i>I3</i> , “All Hail the Brain,” mm. 21-28	198
7.20	Jason Robert Brown, <i>I3</i> , “All Hail the Brain,” mm. 37-43	199
7.21	Jason Robert Brown, <i>I3</i> , “All Hail the Brain,” mm. 56-58	200
7.22	Jason Robert Brown, <i>The Last Five Years</i> , “The Schmucl Song,” mm. 75-80	201
7.23	Jason Robert Brown, <i>I3</i> , “Get Me What I Need,” mm 4-9	203
7.24	Jason Robert Brown, <i>I3</i> , “Get Me What I Need,” mm 46-52	204
7.25	Jason Robert Brown, <i>I3</i> , “Thirteen/Becoming a Man,” mm. 209-215.....	205
7.26	Jason Robert Brown, <i>I3</i> , “The Schmucl Song,” mm. 1-4	210
7.27	Jason Robert Brown, <i>The Last Five Years</i> , “The Schmucl Song,” mm. 77-80	210
7.28	Jason Robert Brown, <i>I3</i> , “All Hail the Brain/Terminal Illness,” mm. 151-156.....	212
7.29	Jason Robert Brown, <i>Parade</i> , “Pretty Music,” mm. 63-70	214

7.30	Jason Robert Brown, <i>Parade</i> , “Big News!,” mm. 54-56.....	216
7.31	Daniel Decatur Emmett, “Dixie,” mm. 1-10.....	219
7.32	Jason Robert Brown, <i>Parade</i> , “How Can I Call This Home,” mm. 33-35	219
7.33	Jason Robert Brown, <i>Parade</i> , “How Can I Call This Home?,” mm. 63-38 ..	220
7.34	Charles Ives, “The Things our Fathers Loved,” mm. 1-4	221
7.35	Lowell Mason and William Cowper, “There is a Fountain Filled with Blood”	222
7.36	Charles Ives, “The Watchman,” mm 1-10	224

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION, METHOD, AND SCHOLARSHIP

The musical has been popular across America since its rise to prominence in the early decades of the twentieth century. Along with jazz, it was one of few art forms considered indigenously American. As Larry Stempel wrote, “Musicals provide one way of taking the pulse of American culture.”¹ Two landmark shows exemplify this: *Show Boat* (1927) exhibited the plight of the black underclass in America, while *Oklahoma!* (1943) revived the appeal of a simpler life within a period of war.² The success of a musical production relies on the dynamic relationship between four key players: the composer, the patron, the audience, and the critic.

A musical production is a democratic endeavor. After the script and the music have been written, it is primarily up to the director(s) to govern treatment of this material. There is, therefore, a wide array of interpretations between each production of the same material. This can be compared to music artists ‘covering’ an older tune. In theater today, it is common to use the classic material, but be guided by individual choices. Consequently, these productions are not always entirely faithful to the original production, and they often reflect the changing of the times, and the voice of America.

¹ Larry Stempel, *Showtime! A History of the Broadway Musical Theater* (New York: W.W Norton & Company, 2010), 13.

² Geoffrey Block, *Enchanted Evenings: The Broadway Musical from Show Boat to Sondheim* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 40.

During the first part of the twentieth century, songs from musicals rose to popularity as “hits,” infiltrating popular culture. These standard tunes melded classic American styles such as jazz and ragtime, expressing pride and hope in an expanding nation. Musicals even found a way to adapt to the changing times as the century progressed, and as movies rose to popularity in the 1930s, musicals originally conceived for the stage began to be produced for the screen.

Since that time, movie musicals and movie adaptations have appeared regularly in theaters. Recently, *Newsday* declared 2014 to be “the year of the musical.”³ That year, four major musicals were revived as movies: *Annie*, *Into the Woods*, *The Last Five Years*, and *Jersey Boys*. All four originated as stage musicals in 1977, 1983, 2001, and 2005, respectively. The presence of so many musicals on the big screen in a single year suggests the vibrant role that the medium of musical theater continues to play within American popular culture as a whole.

The musical that transitions from the stage to a motion picture has proved itself as a lasting piece of the musical theater repertoire. Some examples of successful musical movies that have been produced over the last sixty years show this to be true: *West Side Story* (1961), *The Sound of Music* (1965), *Annie* (1982), *Evita* (1997), *Chicago* (2002), and *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (2007). A look at the composers of each of these movies reveals a sample of some of the most influential musical songwriters and teams in American musical theater history, including Leonard Bernstein, Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein, Charles Strouse, Andrew Lloyd Webber, John Kander and Fred Ebb, and Stephen Sondheim.

³ Rafer Guzman, “Must-see Movies for 2014,” www.newsday.com/entertainment/movies/must-see-movies-for-2014-1.8069140 (2014), accessed 22 May 2014.

Of the movie musicals released in 2014, composers Charles Strouse (*Annie*, in its third movie version) and Stephen Sondheim (*Into the Woods*, its second movie version⁴) are two familiar and influential figures in musical theater. Strouse has been successful both on Broadway and in the pop charts since his first musical hit, *Bye Bye Birdie*, opened on Broadway in 1960.⁵ Stephen Sondheim is a highly awarded composer who is said to have re-invented musical theater in America.⁶ A relatively unfamiliar composer also appears on the 2014 movie musical list: *The Last Five Years* is by Jason Robert Brown. *The Philadelphia Inquirer* describes this young composer as “one of Broadway’s smartest, and most sophisticated songwriters since Stephen Sondheim.”⁷

Brown’s comparison to Sondheim is rooted in the fact that they both write challenging music and stimulating lyrics, and they both explore serious subject matter.⁸ When it comes to musical content, however, Brown has developed a style that uses many of Sondheim’s ideas, yet also models many others. This study examines Jason Robert Brown’s musical style in four of his musicals, and compares this style with historical and

⁴ The original 1985 Broadway cast filmed the production for a commercial recording.

⁵ www.charlesstrouse.com

⁶ Among his numerous awards include an Oscar and eight Tonys. Simon Fanshawe, “An Iconoclast on Broadway,” www.theguardian.com/books/2000/dec/09/books.guardianreview6 (2000), accessed 22 May 2014.

⁷ Mark Sullivan, “The Making of a Musical,” news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2014/03/the-making-of-a-musical/ (2014), accessed 20 May 2014.

⁸ Robin Rauzi, “Theater; He Sings, She Sings; from Hope to Hurt, the Laguna-Bound ‘the Last Five Years’ Charts the Rise and Fall of a Marriage Along Two Conflicting Timelines. Tony-Winning Composer Jason Robert Brown Speaks from Personal Experience,” *Los Angeles Times*, 28 December 2003.

Adrian Rogers, “Songs’ For a Nonprofit: Civic Theatre Hopes to Score with Tony Award-Winner Jason Robert Brown’s Musical Numbers,” *Spokesman Review*, 26 October 2012.

Bob Hicks, “‘New World’ Musical Will Close Week Early,” *The Oregonian*, 13 February 2001.

contemporary musical theater composers. The intent is to reveal the compositional techniques that give his musicals dramatic power.

Songs in Musical Theater

Musical theater invites criticisms similar to those of opera. The genre is implausible, as spontaneously breaking into coordinated song and dance does not seem a likely experience. In musical theater, songs are strategically placed to enhance the story, composed to contribute to the dramatic action or the emotional experience at specific moments. Lyricist Oscar Hammerstein II describes the role of the songs in his musicals: “They help tell our story and delineate characters, supplementing the dialogue and seeming to be, as much as possible, a continuation of dialogue.”⁹ This principle of music serving the drama is central to modern American musical theater.

In the stage shows of the early twentieth century, however, the songs were often written before the story. Musical composers of the 1920s and 1930s such as Irving Berlin and Cole Porter wrote songs that they knew could become ‘hits’ on their own, guaranteeing an audience and therefore a profit. They then built a plot around the songs, tying them together. Although the songs became popular, the overall musical production lacked cohesion and dramatic unity. This changed considerably when composers such as Jerome Kern, George Gershwin, and the team of Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein popularized the “integrated musical,” where the songs fit into the story at specific, emotional moments. Since that time, this concept has prevailed,¹⁰ and thorough discussion of this idea is included in Chapter II.

⁹ Stempel, *Showtime*, 307.

¹⁰ William Everett and Paul Laird, eds, *The Cambridge Companion to the Musical*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 151.

Modern musical theater shows frequently produce ‘hit’ numbers that are introduced to the public as stand-alone songs. While these songs are quite popular, they often miss the power they had when placed in the dramatic moment for which they were originally intended. For example, Sondheim’s “Send in the Clowns” is known for its haunting melody and is frequently sung in a cabaret or revue. Although the song is enjoyed in this setting, it lacks the tension that is created when the song is heard within the second act of *A Little Night Music*. The emptiness and shame Desiree feels over the loss of her chance of a life with Fredrick transforms a lovely song into a heart-wrenching epiphany.

Jason Robert Brown also writes hit songs; however, many of these hits were written without a theatrical narrative in mind. “Stars and the Moon,” his most performed and recorded song, was originally written for a cabaret. Only later did he decide to use it in his musical, *Songs For a New World*.¹¹ Brown’s method of writing the songs prior to the drama is, therefore, often more closely aligned with the methods of the songwriters in early American musical theater (to be discussed in detail in Chapter II).

Defining This Study: The Music of Jason Robert Brown

Jason Robert Brown (b. 1970) has been acclaimed as “one of the most promising theater songwriters from the end of the twentieth century.”¹² JRB, as his cult-like followers refer to him, has written six full-length musicals in addition to various other projects. In a 2014 *Huffington Post* article, Suzy Evans describes the current generation

¹¹ Jason Robert Brown, “Jason Robert Brown, the JRB Collection,” jasonrobertbrown.com/projects/the-jrb-collection/ (2005), accessed 24 July 2014.

¹² Thomas Hischak, “Brown, Jason Robert,” *The Oxford Companion to the American Musical*, (online version, 2008; accessed 19 July 2014.), www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195335330.001.0001/acref-9780195335330-e-244.

of musical theater students as “the Jason Robert Brown Generation.”¹³ Brown’s challenging scores are immensely personal and praised for evoking deep emotions within audiences. His musicals often tackle serious and uncomfortable issues with a depth of reverence. As a lyricist, he is known for incisive character revelation achieved through his songs.¹⁴ Yet, while young music students frequently perform and study Brown’s music, he has had trouble impressing audiences and critics.

This study is an attempt to describe elements of musical style in the songs of Jason Robert Brown. Brown’s songs achieve the same dramatic power as many celebrated musical theater composers, though there is no present study that examines the manner in which this is achieved. The following analysis summarizes various aspects of Brown’s compositional style. Chapters II and III include a history of the formation of the American musical theater genre and overarching trends as it developed throughout the twentieth century. These chapters also recount the major composers and productions from this genre, as well as their reception by critics and audiences. A discussion of song forms and types closes each chapter. Chapter IV is an extended introduction to Brown’s life and works. Chapter V explores the formal organization of his songs—both solo and duet. Chapter VI is a discussion of Brown’s rhythmic tendencies, and the manner in which they enhance the lyrics. Chapter VII is an analysis of the various musical styles he utilizes in his works. Chapter VIII summarizes and offers conclusions about his compositional style and integration of dramatic ideas. Throughout Chapters V, VI, and VII, comparisons are

¹³ Suzy Evans, “The Jason Robert Brown Generation,” *www.huffingtonpost.com* (2014), accessed 1 March 2014.

¹⁴ Hirschak, “Brown, Jason Robert.”

made to the compositional techniques of Brown's predecessors. In addition, this study examines both audiences' and critics' reception of his works.

One of the challenges inherent in this study is that Brown is a contemporary writer, probably at the beginning of a long career. While this study will identify current trends in musical theater, it is unable to offer ideas about his place in history, as Brown's place in American musical theater history is yet to be determined. However, this study will offer significant perspectives regarding trends in his first shows.

Selecting the Musicals

The songs chosen for this study are all written entirely by Jason Robert Brown, as both composer and lyricist. They are selected from his first four musicals, *Songs for a New World* (1995), *Parade* (1998), *The Last Five Years* (2001), and *13* (2008). Not every song from each show is addressed in the following chapters, only those that are considered especially indicative of his compositional style. Songs will be analyzed from the published Vocal Selections from each musical.¹⁵ A complete list of all songs from these four shows is included in Appendix A, and a synopsis of each show is included in Appendix B.

Definitions

In this research, song "form" is consistent with theoretical analysis. Form describes the layout of the song, considering sections with contrasting musical material and tonal centers (denoted A, B, C, etc.). Song "type" refers to a classification method of organizing songs based on their function. This classification is independent of musical elements, although musical trends within these types are discussed.

¹⁵ The full scores of each of these shows are not available for research purposes. Some conclusions are drawn from the original cast recordings of each musical.

A “book musical” is a musical that is driven by a central plot, and the songs serve the drama. Book musicals are also referred to as “integrated musicals.” In theater, “book” is the term used for the script. The corresponding term in opera is “libretto,” and many writers use “book” and “libretto” interchangeably when speaking of musicals.

All premiere dates (in parentheses) refer to the year that the musical opened on Broadway, or Off-Broadway if the show did not open shortly after on Broadway. For example, *Little Shop of Horrors* opened Off-Broadway in 1982 and not on Broadway until 2002, so 1982 is the appropriate year.

The reference of opening “on Broadway” indicates a specific location. A “Broadway Theater” refers to any New York facility with over 500 seats; there are forty theaters with this designation. A theater is classified as “Off-Broadway” if it is in New York and contains 100-499 seats. “Off-Off-Broadway” describes a New York theater with fewer than 100 seats. There are exceptions to this, and Broadway theaters are located near Broadway Avenue, while Off-Broadway and Off-Off-Broadway locations can be found anywhere in Manhattan.¹⁶

Four Components of Musical Success

Musical theater and opera are unique in that they rely on many production elements to create the final product. The writers of the book, lyrics, and music create the show in its purest form, and at times, such as in some shows by Jason Robert Brown, a single person creates all three. Once the show has been written, a producer must be found to hire a team and support the costs of the production.¹⁷ This production team shapes the

¹⁶ Pincus-Roth, Zachary, "Ask Playbill.com: Broadway or Off-Broadway—Part I," *Playbill.com* (2008), accessed 24 July 2014.

¹⁷ A description of the costs of production is included in Chapter II.

show and includes a director, choreographer, costume designer, set designer, lighting designer, sound designer, and properties master. The director typically has the final word on subjective decisions affecting the production. When a musical opens for the first time in New York City or elsewhere, the original writers are often heavily involved, making sure that the show is staged in the way they intended. Subsequent productions of the musical will have a different creative team, resulting in different overall concepts and presentations. Sometimes, the writers will give directions within the script to guide the members of the creative team. The present study is concerned only with the musical as written by the original writers of the book and score, not the interpretation of the creative team of any individual production.

Musicals are often defined in terms of being a “hit” or a “flop” on Broadway, a vague pronouncement that usually refers to how long the musical stayed open. It is important to define the elements that make a musical successful. There are two entities that the producer of a musical hopes to please: the general audience and the critics. The reception of the audience is demonstrated in the number of seats the show sells. If tickets for a show do not sell well, the show will close, thus the presence and enthusiasm of the audience is pivotal to its success. Audiences, however, can be swayed by the opinions of theater critics, who give a published review prior to opening night.

The relationship between critical review and audience appeal is not as connected as it has been in the past. During American musical theater’s Golden Age (1937-1964), a bad review could break a show, but there were also eleven major newspapers with theater

critics in New York City to provide some diversity in opinions.¹⁸ The overall critical reception of the musical could then be described as “positive,” “negative,” or “mixed.” Most shows opened out of town before the Broadway run to ensure that they were prepared for the critical review in New York.¹⁹ The review from the *New York Times* was key, as the *Times* has been predominantly known as the “best” of the New York daily newspapers.²⁰ After the premiere of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1949), star Carol Channing was told the show was a hit (referring to the critical reviews). Channing asked if it was unanimous, to which creator Anita Loos replied: “Carol, you will never get unanimous notices. The fact that it thrilled most people has to mean that it irritated some. If it stirred up the air at all, it has to run smack against someone.”²¹ A show could combat a mixed review with strong press coverage, usually through the photo-driven, weekly *Life* magazine. Steven Suskin writes of the influence: “Broadway lost one of its most important publicity outlets when *Life* died.”²²

Today, critics are still influential, but to a lesser degree. By 1990, there were only three major newspapers left in New York City.²³ Suskin describes this decline: “in the mid-1950s, many people read both a morning and an evening paper. Today, those theatre-ticket buyers who read *any* paper at all—rather than getting their view of the world solely from television or radio—usually read only one newspaper. That paper is the *Times*.”²⁴

¹⁸ Steven Suskin, *Opening Night on Broadway: A Critical Quotebook of the Golden Era of the Musical Theater, Oklahoma! (1943) to Fiddler on the Roof (1964)*, (New York: Schirmer Books, 1990), 14.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, xviii.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

²¹ Suskin, *Opening Night*, xvii.

²² *Life* was published weekly until 1978, and then monthly until 2000.

²³ Suskin, *Opening Night*, 14.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

For this reason, many producers today are more aggressive at promoting their musicals through advertising and merchandising, trying to attract tourists who may not follow reviews.²⁵

From 1925-1960, the most respected reviewer was Brooks Atkinson, of the *New York Times*.²⁶ He is credited with aiding the rise of musical theater during the 1920s and 1930s, and in his obituary the *Times* called him “the theater’s most influential reviewer of his time.”²⁷ His successor, Walter Kerr, wrote three musicals before beginning his career as a drama critic. He wrote for the *Times* for seventeen years, covering most of the shows by Stephen Sondheim and Andrew Lloyd Webber. The current *Times* reviewer is Ben Brantley, who has been their chief drama critic since 1993.

The critics exert a fascinating power over the production, in that they are the only entity unaffected by a positive or negative review: they simply give their opinions and move on to the next show. Critical reviews, despite what they claim, are almost never completely devoid of bias, providing evidence of personal preference as much as established fact. Throughout the history of American Musical Theater, composers have reacted differently to the pressure to please both audiences and critics.

In addition to critical acclaim, a musical can also be praised through awards. The annual Tony Awards have been recognizing achievement on Broadway since 1947. These trophies are named after Antoinette Perry, leader of the American Theater Wing, who passed away in 1946.²⁸ The prestigious “Tony” represents the votes of twenty-four

²⁵ Stempel, *Showtime*, 652.

²⁶ Suskin, *Opening Night*, 17.

²⁷ Richard Shepperd, "Brooks Atkinson, 89, DEAD; Key Voice in Drama 31 years," *The New York Times*, 15 January 1984.

²⁸ “The Tony Awards,” www.tonyawards.com (2014), accessed 8 August 2014.

representatives from the theater industry. The number of awards a musical receives will often aid in its publicity, producing more audience interest, thus selling more seats.

The final, and perhaps most important aspect of what makes a musical successful is its longevity. It is not uncommon for a musical to get poor reviews, close after a short run, not turn a profit, and still become a well-known musical. After their initial Broadway run closes, musicals have the potential for being licensed for stock, regional, and amateur productions.²⁹ *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* (1982) closed after three performances on Broadway, but was able to successfully repay investors after fifteen years of performances by light-opera companies, community theaters, and student groups.³⁰ The original 1954 movie of the same name perpetuated the popularity of the stage show, and it was attractive to amateur groups because it offered many roles for both men and women.

Musical theater is a commercial entity that relies on profit to survive. Conversely, opera establishments like The Metropolitan are considered non-profit, trustee-governed enterprises, benefiting from subsidies and tax-exemptions.³¹ Therefore, opera composers generally have the freedom to experiment with a new idea that may fail without the pressure to survive. Musical theater, contrarily, relies on box office success as the bottom line.

In summary, the success of a musical can be described by the dynamic relationship between four entities: the producer, the writer or creative team, the audience, and the critic. The producer is motivated by financial gain, since he or she is responsible

²⁹ Elizabeth Weiss, "To Flip a Flop," www.newyorker.com/business/currency/to-flip-a-flop (2014), accessed 24 July 2014.

³⁰ Weiss, "To Flip a Flop."

³¹ Stempel, *Showtime*, 375.

for making sure the musical can pay back its investors. This is accomplished when audiences respond positively to the show by buying more tickets. Audiences are more likely to see a show if it has received favorable reviews from the critics, or has won multiple awards. The composer writes for different reasons, either financial gain or aesthetics. The producer, the writers, the composer, and the audience all want the show to succeed. The critic is the only one who has not invested in the production (even the ticket is usually provided), and also the only one who is unaffected by the review. However, Jason Robert Brown composes in the twenty-first century, where musicals can be successful based on longevity, even when audiences and critics do not respond with favor.

Survey of the Literature

Although opera has always been a subject deemed worthy of study, musical theater has struggled to be regarded as a serious academic discipline. This is demonstrated by examining the attitudes of two musical theater histories from the past seventy years. The first attempt at an historical study, Cecil Smith's *Musical Comedy in America* (1950), is a comprehensive survey of the subject. In the foreword, Smith says of his own study: "If the descriptions and assessments of the pieces and people [this book] deals with are offhand rather than scholastic, this is because the medium itself does not suggest [scholarly study] and the devices of the doctor's dissertation."³² Joseph Swain's *The Broadway Musical: A Critical and Musical Survey* (1990) was written forty years later, but his sentiment echoes that of Smith's. After describing a too-short list of the

³² Cecil Smith, *Musical Comedy in America* (New York: Theater Arts Books, 1981), ix.

existing scholarship in musical theater, he writes ironically in the introduction: “Isn’t a critical study a bit lofty for Broadway?”³³

This attitude existed because musical theater remained a broadly “popular” genre. For much of the twentieth century, theater was viewed as a commodity for the American middle class, and was therefore deemed superficial.³⁴ James Ryan O’Leary’s *Broadway Highbrow Discourse and Politics of the American Musical, 1943-1946* (2012) is a look at how the loose structure of ‘highbrow,’ ‘lowbrow,’ and ‘middlebrow’ in American culture was established “not by capital, but by art.”³⁵ Social classification is not determined by income, but by taste. O’leary states that the highbrow rejected art that was defined by sentimentality or a moral message, which is a trademark of musical theater.³⁶ He also confirms that any art that was overly popular was disdained, quoting Winthrop Sargeant, “highbrows are apt to assume that widespread commercial success is a sure sign of inferiority.”³⁷ Musical theater was also disdained by many because it had roots in early vaudeville and burlesques, known for being risqué and low-class. Richard Butsch’s *The Making of American Audiences: From Stage to Television, 1750-1990* (2000) also reveals the manner in which the middle class flocked to the Broadway stage.³⁸ Much progress has since been made, but musical theater still struggles to be accepted among scholars with the same respect as opera.

³³ Joseph Swain, *The Broadway Musical: A Critical and Musical Survey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 7.

³⁴ Stempel, *Showtime*, 11.

³⁵ James Ryan O’Leary, *Broadway Highbrow Discourse and Politics of the American Musical, 1943-1946* (Ph.D. Diss., Yale University, 2012).

³⁶ O’Leary, *Broadway Highbrow Discourse*, 25.

³⁷ Ibid., 25.

³⁸ Richard Butsch, *The Making of American Audiences: From Stage to Television, 1750-1990* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

The situation has certainly improved in the last half century, although there is not yet an abundance of research in the study of Broadway musicals. The few studies that exist tend to be primarily concerned with extra-musical ideas. Most examine the genre from a social,³⁹ psychological,⁴⁰ or even more predominantly, an historical point of view.⁴¹ Others focus on the creative teams from an historical angle.⁴²

Since Cecil Smith's disheartening assessment in 1950, there has been increased interest in scholarship regarding the American musical. Ironically, a comparatively small number of studies within musical theater have attempted a detailed analysis of the music. Perhaps most scholars with an interest in critical music study often have an expertise rooted primarily in the classical music tradition. In the first half of the twentieth century, scholars often classified the theater repertoire as neither influential nor worthy of attention.⁴³

This lack of recognition can be attributed to several factors. First, the classical music community generally held a Eurocentric attitude: opera was the popular theater

³⁹ Kellee Van Aken, *Race and Gender in the Broadway Chorus* (Ph.D. Diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2006), or Paul Senior, *Beyond Lift Every Voice and Sing: The Culture of Uplift, Identity, and Politics in Black Musical Theater* (Ph.D. Diss., University of California, San Diego, 2003).

⁴⁰ Rebecca Kidwell, *Feeling Pain Is Normal, 2nd Edition: An Analysis of Grief in the Musical Next to Normal* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013).

⁴¹ Rachel Green, *From Hart to Hammerstein: The Music of Richard Rodgers and His Evolution Toward the Integrated Musical* (M.M. Thesis, California State University, Long Beach, 2010).

Larry Stempel, *Showtime: A History of the Broadway Musical Theater*.

⁴² Foster Hirsh, *Harold Prince and the American Musical Theater* (Applause Theatre & Cinema Book Publishers, 2005).

Andrea Most, *We Know We Belong to the Land: Jews and the American Musical Theater* (Ph.D. Diss., Brandeis University, 2001).

⁴³ Jill Gold Wright, "Creating America on Stage: How Jewish Composers and Lyricists Pioneered American Musical Theater" (M.M. Thesis, The Claremont Graduate University, 2003), 1.

genre in Italy, and therefore it was esteemed in America. According to Larry Stempel, opera's "ties to European culture made it an emblem of prestige, commonly viewed as the highest form of theater."⁴⁴ Second, many of the most successful musical theater composers lacked formal musical training. For example, Irving Berlin could write songs only in the key of F sharp and needed a copyist to transpose them for publication.⁴⁵ Finally, the disdain of many academics during the formative years of American Musical Theater was likely a direct result of the fact that many of the leading composers were Jewish. While audiences responded favorably to the entertainment, the scholarly community did not accept Jewish writers until much later.⁴⁶

Not until 1977 did the first authoritative study of a single musical appear in book form: Miles Kreuger's critical analysis of *"Show Boat": The Story of a Classic American Musical*.⁴⁷ This is a comparative and comprehensive survey of the original novel by Edna Ferber and the Broadway premiere, the subsequent revivals, and the three film versions. Although it is a thorough analysis of various productions, the book fails to mention what is happening within the music score.

Since that time, Broadway show monographs, or studies that outline constructs within a single show, have become more common. Studies that analyze musical composition have also become popular. Some of these are composer monographs, in that

⁴⁴ Stempel, *Showtime*, 97.

⁴⁵ Yet other composers had impressive resumes: for example, Richard Rodgers studied at Julliard, and Cole Porter studied with Vincent d'Indy at the esteemed *Conservatoire de Paris*. See Swain, *Broadway Musical*, 9.

⁴⁶ Most, "Belong to This Land."

⁴⁷ Miles Kreuger, *Show Boat: The Story of a Classic American Musical* (New York: Oxford University Press), 1977.

they consider the works of a single composer,⁴⁸ while others examine musical form and analysis through a single show.⁴⁹ Only a few focus on aspects of performance practice⁵⁰ or the musical accompaniment.⁵¹ The concentration of most of these studies is specific to a single element, and they do not try to address trends or patterns between different composers or productions.

Many scholars have looked at musicals from an historical perspective. Corinne Naden's *The Golden Age of Musical Theater* (2011) is a catalogue of musicals presented during those years, complete with biographies of actors, directors, composers, lyricists, and choreographers.⁵² Steven Suskin's *Opening Night on Broadway: A Critical Quotebook of the Golden Era of the Musical Theater, Oklahoma! (1943) to Fiddler on the Roof (1964)* (1990), is a chronicle of reviews and quotations from the performers, creative teams, and drama critics addressing the initial reception of these musicals.⁵³ In the introduction, Suskin suggests that the abrupt end of the Golden Age was the result of the absence of any truly great songwriters. He maintains that no consistently successful songwriters have come to Broadway, with the exception of Stephen Sondheim, who,

⁴⁸ Michael Buchler, "Modulation as a Dramatic Agent in Frank Loesser's Broadway Songs," *Music Theory Spectrum*, Spring 2008.

⁴⁹ David Moschler, "Compositional Style and Process in Rodgers and Hammerstein's "Carousel," (M.A. Thesis, University of California, Davis, 2010). Adam Roberts, *An Analysis of Musical Narrative and Signification in Jason Robert Brown's Score for "Parade,"* (M.M. Thesis, The Florida State University, 2005).

⁵⁰ Kotnim Chun, *Musical Theater and the Classical Voice: Crossover Singing in the Twentieth Century* (Ph.D. Diss., University of Maryland, 2009).

⁵¹ Steven Suskin, *The Sound of Broadway Music: A Book of Orchestrators and Orchestrations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁵² Naden, *The Golden Age*.

⁵³ Suskin, *Opening Night on Broadway*.

“....*has* written some brilliant scores, but one man alone cannot revive a tarnished Golden Era.”⁵⁴

Stephen Sondheim is perhaps the most studied composer in American musical theater history. His advanced musical style has prompted many writers to examine his style. For example, *New York Times* columnist Samuel Friedman’s 1984 article, “The Words and Music of Stephen Sondheim,” examines the process and the textual considerations more so than the scores themselves.⁵⁵

A second example of research on Sondheim is Peter Charles Landis Purin’s “*I’ve a Voice, I’ve a Voice*”: *Determining Stephen Sondheim’s Compositional Style Through a Music-theoretic Analysis of his Theater Works* (2011). This dissertation examines each of Sondheim’s fourteen shows and attempts to generalize his style. Purin focuses on the relationship between Sondheim’s music and dramatic elements. He identifies a key facet in Sondheim’s compositional voice as the juxtaposition of treble and bass lines, creating “diagonal dissonances.” Purin also found that Sondheim uses highly dramatic chords at unexpected moments. Naming them “effect harmonies,” he compares them to Stravinsky’s distinctive “Petrushka” and “Rite of Spring” chords.⁵⁶ Purin outlines a different effect harmony for each score, including a “nostalgia chord” from *Follies*, a “memory chord” from *A Little Night Music*, a “busy signal chord” from *Company*, and both an “idea chord” and a “lust chord” from *Sweeney Todd*.⁵⁷ His final analysis is of

⁵⁴ Suskin, *Opening Night on Broadway*, 11.

⁵⁵ Samuel Friedman, "The Words and Music of Stephen Sondheim," *New York Times*, 1 April 1984.

⁵⁶ Peter Charles Landis Purin, *"I've a Voice, I've a Voice": Determining Stephen Sondheim's Compositional Style through a Music-Theoretic Analysis of His Theater Works*, (Ph.D. Diss., University of Kansas, 2011).

⁵⁷ Purin, ""*I've a Voice*,"" 147.

Sondheim's melodies, noting that he uses large intervals (both directly, and filled in) more frequently than other composers. Purin recognizes the preponderance of recurring motives, and how melodic lines are frequently traded among multiple characters.⁵⁸

Each of Sondheim's musicals has been thoroughly examined in numerous show monographs. Amy Riordan's doctoral dissertation *Sunday in the Park with George, A Musical Curation by Stephen Sondheim* (2007), compares Sondheim's fragmented motivic writing to George Seurat's pointillist painting style.⁵⁹ In Stephen B. Wilson's doctoral dissertation *Motivic, Rhythmic, and Harmonic Procedures of Unification in Stephen Sondheim's Company and A Little Night Music* (1983), he outlines three elements of Sondheim's style that are consistent between these two shows. First, Sondheim employs hemiola, syncopation, counterpoint, and ostinato. Second, he presents primary melodies at the opening and continues to use them exclusively throughout the score. Finally, Sondheim favors chromatically altered chords and extended diatonic chords, rarely utilizing traditional triadic harmonies.⁶⁰ Samuel Brown's doctoral dissertation, *Sondheim's Into the Woods: A History and Criticism* (2006), analyzes the significance of the major themes in that show, including the "bean theme," the "woods theme," and the "I wish" interval.⁶¹ *Singing History: the Musical Construction of Patriotic Identity in 1776 and Assassins* (2003), a doctoral dissertation by Geoffrey

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ "Motivic writing" refers to the repetition of musical ideas to represent specific people, places, or ideas. Amy Riordan, *Sunday in the Park with George, A Musical Curation, by Stephen Sondheim* (Ph.D. Diss., University of Texas, 23 August 2007).

⁶⁰ Stephen Wilson, *Motivic, Rhythmic, and Harmonic Procedures of Unification in Stephen Sondheim's Company and A Little Night Music* (D.A. Diss., Ball State University, 1983).

⁶¹ Samuel Brown, *Sondheim's Into the Woods: A History and Criticism* (Ph.D. Diss., University of Houston, 2006).

Stephenson, discusses how Sondheim alludes to popular American song styles of the nineteenth century (marches, barbershop quartets, and sentimental ballads). Sondheim uses very different music to represent the various assassins, while using dance styles and instrumentation to emphasize their anti-American agenda.⁶²

Stephen Citron's book, *Sondheim and Lloyd-Webber* (2001) is a valuable resource in comparing Sondheim to his contemporary, Andrew Lloyd Webber. Citron offers impressive details into the early upbringing of both Sondheim and Webber, providing insight into how their early training contributed to their creative outputs. Additionally, there is thorough recognition of each composer's early and little-known works, and Purin makes valuable comparisons between their different styles.⁶³

The complexity of Sondheim's productions has prompted interest from disciplines outside of music or theater: Laura Hanson's dissertation, *Elements of Modernism in the Musicals of Stephen Sondheim* (2001), and Lee Orchard's, *The Disintegration of the American Dream: A Study of the Work of Stephen Sondheim from Company to Sunday in the Park with George* (1998), are two examples of the wide range of interest in Sondheim's works.⁶⁴ The attention he has received from scholars of many

⁶² Geoffrey William Stephenson, *Singing History: The Musical Construction of Patriotic Identity in "1776" and "Assassins"* (Ph.D. Diss., Bowling Green State University, 2003).

⁶³ Stephen Citron, *Sondheim and Lloyd Webber: The New Musical* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁶⁴ Laura Hanson, *Elements of Modernism in the Musicals of Stephen Sondheim* (Ph.D. Diss., New York University, 2001).
Lee Orchard, *Stephen Sondheim and the Disintegration of the American Dream: A Study of the Work of Stephen Sondheim from Company to Sunday in the Park with George* (Ph.D. Diss., University of Oregon, 1988).

disciplines not only gives credence to the scholastic value in his productions, but also testifies to his popular reception from audiences.⁶⁵

Andrew Lloyd Webber is another composer who has drawn scholarly notice. Bettyrae Easley's dissertation, *The Romantic Style Inherent in the Works of Andrew Lloyd Webber* (1993), asserts that Webber writes in a Romantic style, through both literary and musical elements. Easley examines four of Webber's shows: *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Evita*, *Cats*, and *The Phantom of the Opera*. Easley devotes most of her analysis to the dramaturgical and theatrical aspects of his shows, instead of the musical content.⁶⁶

A second study on Andrew Lloyd Webber is Daniel Green's dissertation, *A Study of Andrew Lloyd Webber's "Requiem"* (1988). The latter is not a musical, but is Webber's only major choral/orchestral work. Green compares and contrasts Webber's musical style in the "Requiem," with his style in his musicals *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Evita*, *Cats*, *Starlight Express*, and *Phantom of the Opera*. Green also analyzes each movement of the "Requiem" and provides performance considerations.⁶⁷

Other than these two studies, Webber has received less scholarly attention than Sondheim. Recent musical histories mention and describe Webber's musicals but provide little insight into the music itself. Beyond the studies mentioned above, locating a specific study on the compositional techniques of Webber or any other megamusical composer is

⁶⁵ Stempel, *Showtime*, 13.

⁶⁶ Bettyrae Easley, *The Romantic Style Inherent in the Works of Andrew Lloyd Webber* (Ph.D. Diss., University of Oregon, 1993).

⁶⁷ Daniel Green, *A Study of Andrew Lloyd Webber's "Requiem,"* (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Miami, 1988).

rare. Jessica Sternfeld announces in her dissertation: “It is as if a certain sub-group of superior-minded theater-goers have bonded together, and among them, it is “not cool” to like Andrew Lloyd Webber.”⁶⁸

Two recent studies stand out as providing in-depth, music-based analyses of the Broadway canon: Brian Hoffman’s dissertation, *Elements of Musical Theater Style: 1950-2000* (2001), and Joseph Swain’s book, *The Broadway Musical: A Critical And Musical Survey* (1990). Hoffman sought to “identify and elucidate many of the primary musical elements that constitute the American musical theater style in the second half of the twentieth century.”⁶⁹ He hoped to demonstrate “how the musical theater style was united by the common presence of these elements yet significantly changed over time through their development.”⁷⁰ The time period he uses (1950 to 2000) begins with the middle of the “Golden Age,” an era of theater dominated by Rodgers and Hammerstein that spanned 1947-1964.⁷¹ This is the post-World War II era, known for its consensus politics and middle class tastes. One unique aspect of Hoffman’s research is his comparison of the style of music theater composers to that of classical music—i.e. Mozart, Beethoven, and Debussy. Hoffman also limits his repertoire to those musicals

⁶⁸ Jessica Sternfeld, *Megamusical: Revolution on Broadway in the 1970s and 1980s* (Ph.D. Diss., Princeton University, 2002), 155.

⁶⁹ Hoffman, *Musical Theater Style*, ii.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁷¹ Corine Naden, *The Golden Age of American Musical Theater* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2011), 20.

that were not written explicitly in a specific style, such as rock n' roll.⁷² Chapters are divided into the musical elements referred to in his thesis.⁷³

Hoffman assumes that his readers have a basic knowledge of music theory. One heading reads "Bridges that Tonicize *bIII* and *bVI*." He also educates his audience about his own terminology and methodologies, such as in his chapter on hypermeter and text relationships.⁷⁴ Even seasoned music theorists may not be familiar with the specific methodology he is employing.

Swain's study looks at musical elements through the lens of history, partially organized by genre. Swain first traces the beginnings of musical theater in America. Then he offers ten chapters organized by individual categories from which musicals are inspired, and gives an analysis of a prototype show that best represents each category.⁷⁵ He cites Joseph Kerman's philosophies of "composer as dramatist" as the primary source for his premise: that a musical analysis is required "that connects songs in their detail with the dramatic elements of plot, character, and action."⁷⁶ The traditional tools of composition are considered—melody, harmonization, modulation, rhythm, and texture—and are discussed at length as contributors to, or even instigators of, drama. His

⁷² Hoffman, *Musical Theater Style*, 1.

⁷³ The chapter titles include Sonority and Accompaniment, Issues of Hypermeter and Text-music Relationship in Triple-Meter Songs, Chromatic Harmony, and Modality and Expression.

⁷⁴ Hoffman, *Musical Theater Style*, 1.

⁷⁵ The categories (and shows) are as follows: morality play (Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Carousel*), Shakespeare (Cole Porter's *Kiss Me Kate*), love story (Loesser's *The Most Happy Fella*), myth (Lerner and Lowe's *My Fair Lady*), tragedy (Bernstein and Sondheim's *West Side Story*), ethnicity (Bock and Harnick's *Fiddler on the Roof*), religious experience (Stephen Schwartz's *Godspell*), history (Webber and Rice's *Jesus Christ Superstar*), frame story (Bennett's *A Chorus Line*), and thriller (Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*).

⁷⁶ Swain, *Broadway Musical*, 4.

meticulous analysis has been criticized as being excessively technical in regards to theory, and that it is difficult to understand by a general audience.⁷⁷ Don Shiach says of Swain's study: "his target audience appears to be music students and academics."⁷⁸

Each chapter is filled with examples from other musicals that corroborate Swain's thesis that musical conventions contribute to the emotional drama. He makes generalizations at the conclusion of his research regarding musical forms and the demographics of the creators,⁷⁹ but also candidly admits that any conclusions based on only sixteen shows present an oversimplified view, given the vast and diverse body of the literature. Like Hoffman, Swain assumes that his audience is well versed in established music theory.

A significant supplementary study for this research is "An Analysis of Musical Narrative and Signification in Jason Robert Brown's Score for "Parade"" (2005), by Adam Roberts.⁸⁰ This Master's thesis from The Florida State University is the only known work on the music of Jason Robert Brown. Roberts examined "musical symbolism, significance, metaphor, and allegory in *Parade's* music via a narratological reading, with Claudia Gorbman's principles of classical film music serving as the primary analytical framework."⁸¹ Much of Roberts' analysis relies upon narrative content, yet he provides insight into Brown's eclectic choice of musical genres, as well as his use of melodic motives. Roberts concludes that Brown utilizes many American idioms through the styles of Southern folk music, gospel, jazz, and the techniques of

⁷⁷ Block, *Enchanted Evenings*, xvi.

⁷⁸ Sandra K. Baringer, Robert Hapgood and Andrea Most, "*Oklahoma!* and Assimilation," *PMLA*, CXIII/3 (May 1998), 453.

⁷⁹ Swain, *Broadway Musical*, 355.

⁸⁰ Adam Roberts, "Parade."

⁸¹ Roberts, "Parade," vi.

Charles Ives. Roberts speaks to the richness of Brown's scores: "Brown's musical narrative structure—full of symbolism, allusion, metaphor, quotation, paradox, pastiche, dramatic unity, and contrast—brings much more to the table than simply the occasional leitmotif."⁸² Roberts recommends in his conclusion that additional studies explore this music from different perspectives.⁸³

Another helpful study in preparing this research is Jessica Sternfeld's doctoral dissertation *The Megamusical: Revolution on Broadway in the 1970s and 1980s* (2002).⁸⁴ This study is a thorough dissection of the megamusical in America. Sternfeld outlines different shows in each chapter, including *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Cats*, and *Phantom of the Opera* (all by Andrew Lloyd Webber), and *Les Misérables* (by Claude-Michel Schönberg and Alain Boublil). Much of the material is historically or background based, but each does include basic information on the score from each show. Sternfeld examines recurring motifs and themes, and also makes comparisons to opera.⁸⁵

Swain, Hoffman, Roberts, and Sternfeld have all attempted to bridge the gap between musical theater and music scholarship. Each of their respective studies corroborate that music is what creates, maintains, and peaks the dramatic intensity in a stage show. However, their conclusions are based only on the small sample of shows considered. None of these studies consider music beyond the end of the twentieth century. There is a need for research that analyzes music from recent shows to enhance a growing field of musical theater scholarship.

⁸² Ibid., 23.

⁸³ Ibid., 54.

⁸⁴ Sternfeld, *Megamusical*.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

The incompleteness of the body of literature focusing on critical analysis in musical theater is understandable, considering the relative youth of the discipline. Stephen Sondheim and Andrew Lloyd Webber are the most widely recognized living musical composers, largely because of the success of their productions. These two have been successful in the past, but neither has produced a blockbuster since the early 1990s. There is a need for studies that consider the music of more contemporary writers through composer monographs.

This study attempts to bridge this gap. Jason Robert Brown is a significant modern composer whose music has been barely considered by scholars. His compositional style resembles Sondheim, Webber, and other composers past and present, but he has had difficulty connecting with a broad audience. This study examines how Brown compares with other successful musical composers, and what it is about his style that has caused interest and respect among theatergoers. The hope is that the present research will contribute to the growing field of musical theater scholarship by describing the works of a noteworthy composer from a music-analytical perspective, and examining how his compositional techniques enhance the drama of his musicals.

CHAPTER II

THE HISTORY OF AMERICAN MUSICAL THEATER I: BIRTH—GOLDEN ERA

At the start of the twentieth century, American entertainment was predominantly comprised of variety shows. “Variety” refers to different types of revue-style shows, such as minstrelsy, burlesques, and vaudeville. Minstrel shows represent one of the first distinctly American forms of entertainment, first appearing in the 1840s. White entertainers would blacken their faces with burnt cork to portray southern plantation slave life through song, dance, dress, and dialect in a combination of impersonations, acrobatics, clog dancing, and farces of popular plays or operas. For example, Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* became “Julius the Snoozer.”¹ Vaudeville performers of the 1920s, such as George M. Cohan and James Cagney, performed comedy acts to entertain audiences with music at the center. Burlesques were of a similar variety but featured scantily clad showgirls as the prime appeal.

Around the same time, operetta, or “light opera”, emerged from the comic opera tradition that had permeated France and Italy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These dramas were characterized by frivolous and humorous subject matter, and always included a happy ending.² Plots usually involved amusing love triumphs and woes among

¹ Stempel, *Showtime*, 58.

² Ibid.

stock characters: an innocent ingénue, a dashing hero, a conniving villain, or a jovial clown.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the British operetta team of W. S. Gilbert and Sir Arthur Sullivan were dominating box offices in London with *H.M.S Pinafore* (1878), *The Pirates of Penzance* (1879), and *The Mikado* (1885). *H.M.S Pinafore* was imported to America, opening in Boston on November 25th, 1878, an event described by many scholars as a turning point in the history of American musical theater. Within a year it was the most performed operetta in America.³ Gerald Bordman identifies *H.M.S Pinafore* as being the single production that “determined the course and shape of the popular lyric stage in England and America for the final quarter of the nineteenth century.”⁴ Katherine K. Preston suggests that probable explanations for the popularity of Gilbert and Sullivan in America include “the inoffensiveness of the humor (especially in comparison with burlesque, vaudeville, or even *opera buffa*), the witty satire at the expense of the British establishment, and Sullivan’s skillful melodies.”⁵

The storylines of these operettas were commonplace and ridiculous at the same time. In *Pirates of Penzance*, the young Frederick is indentured to serve with the pirate crew until his twenty-first birthday, but in Act Two we learn that he was born on February 29th, meaning he technically has to remain another 63 years. Gilbert’s witty, fast-paced lyrics needed no translation and were amusingly clever. They were also characterized by ridiculous rhymes, such as in the patter song, “My Name is John Wellington Wells,” from their operetta, *The Sorcerer* (1877).

³ Everett and Laird, *Cambridge*, 24.

⁴ Gerald Bordman, “Every Love but True Love: Unstable Relationships in Cole Porter’s ‘Love for Sale’,” *PopMusicology*, Lüneberg, Germany: Transcript (2008), 184.

⁵ Everett and Laird, *Cambridge*, 24.

With the success of Gilbert and Sullivan's *H.M.S Pinafore* in Boston, American composers attempted to write in a similar style. Of classical violinist John Philip Sousa's fifteen operettas, *El Capitan* (1886) was his only success. Sousa is remembered more for his traveling concert bands and contributions to the march repertoire. In 1891, composer Reginald deKoven and lyricist Harry B. Smith wrote music for the stage show *Robin Hood*. They were the first American team to attempt to write a play interlaced with songs directly related to the drama. Eugene Huber identifies *Robin Hood* as being a "landmark in the history of American Musical Theater...primarily due to its strong storyline...and its intentional integration of the lyrics, music, and plot."⁶

This affinity for musical stage shows continued past the turn of the century, as operetta became one of the most popular art forms in America. The success of Austrian composer Franz Lehar's "The Merry Widow" in 1907, on Broadway and with subsequent American tours, was widespread enough to create a national *Widow*-mania. Related merchandise, including scores and sheet music, was immensely popular, and it seemed that every piano in America displayed a copy of "The Merry Widow Waltz." Committed fans in New York City could enjoy both a 'Widow' hat and a "Merry Widow cocktail."⁷ Operetta scholar Richard Traubner describes this unprecedented commercial success:

It is difficult to keep track of the amazing statistics of *The Merry Widow*. It has been translated into at least twenty-five languages, has been depicted in at least three ballets, has been recorded

⁶Eugene Huber, *Stephen Sondheim and Harold Prince: Collaborative Contributions to the Development of the Modern Concept Musical, 1970-1981*, (Ph.D. Diss., New York University, 1990), 11.

⁷ The *Merry Widow Cocktail* was made with 1 1/2 oz. each of Gin & Sweet Vermouth, with a dash each of Pernod & Bitters, served strained over ice and garnished with a lemon twist.

John Kendrick, "Merry Widow 101: The History of a Hit," www.musicals101.com/widowhist2.htm (2004), accessed 1 November 2004.

innumerable times, has had enormous sheet-music sales (these alone made Lehár a multimillionaire), and has been filmed many times.⁸

Classical cellist Victor Herbert achieved success in America as an operetta composer in the 1910s. His early productions, *Babes in Toyland* (1903), *Mlle Modiste* (1905), and *The Red Mill* (1906), put him at the forefront of American stage entertainment. With over fifty theatrical works running in New York City and on national tours, Herbert helped define the Broadway Avenue area around 42nd Street in Manhattan as the center of American theater. His compositional style is similar to that of Gilbert and Sullivan, and he is known for incorporating waltzes into his shows.⁹

It was during the early part of the twentieth century in America that music became a commodity, due to mass commercialization. Emile Berliner had developed the disc record gramophone in 1895, allowing for the ease of distribution of recorded music governed by a licensure system.¹⁰ David Suisman describes how this affected the availability of music in *Selling Sounds: The Commercial Revolution in American Music* (2009): “Music, which had once been produced in the home, by hand, was now something to be purchased, like a newspaper or ready-to-wear dress.”¹¹ Songwriting

⁸ Richard Traubner, *Operetta: A Theatrical History* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1983), 236.

⁹ Steven Ledbetter, "Herbert, Victor," *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press (online version; accessed 1 February 2014), www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/12833.

¹⁰ David Suisman, *Selling Sounds: The Commercial Revolution in American Music* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 5.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

became a valid profession and an industry was created, known as Tin Pan Alley.¹² Tin Pan Alley originally referred to West 28th Street between Fifth and Sixth Avenues in Manhattan, but soon came to refer to an entire body of composers and their music. It became a valuable outlet for ethnic groups in New York City, as Jewish Americans found a voice writing popular songs in a ragtime style.¹³ The song styles of Tin Pan Alley are discussed later in this chapter.

The effect of the commercialization of music on the theater industry cannot be overstated. Sheet music sales became the measure of a song's success, so a composer's highest aim was to write a 'hit' that would top the charts. In the lobby after each operetta performance, sheet music was made available for purchase,¹⁴ and composers relied on these sales to cover production costs and make a living.

American operettas maintained their British roots with regard to style. The operettas of Gilbert and Sullivan and Franz Lehar had featured a cohesive storyline connected with intentionally placed songs. At about the same time, a different style of show called the "musical comedy" emerged from the variety show genre. Musical comedies borrowed the operetta's idea of a cohesive, though unrealistic storyline connected by songs. Irish immigrant George M. Cohan was the first vaudevillian to write a plot-based show with *Little Johnny Jones* in 1904. Cohan wrote the book, lyrics, and music, as well as starring as the title character. Retaining the humor and wit from

¹² The most common speculation for the unique name is attributed to a writer from the New York Herald who was hired to write about the new business of sheet music publishing in the city, "...as he walked down 28th Street toward the publishing offices, he heard the dissonant chords and strings of competing pianos through the open windows. The sound, he remarked, sounded like a bunch of tin pans clanging." Ibid., 21. www.songwritershalloffame.org/exhibits/eras/C1002, accessed 4 May 2015.

¹³ Stempel, *Showtime*, 145.

¹⁴ Suisman, *Selling Sounds*, 79.

vaudeville, his musical style was simple and patriotic, in stark contrast to the British style operettas that were popular in New York City. Two of Cohan's most well-known songs come from this show: "Give My Regards to Broadway," and "The Yankee Doodle Boy."¹⁵

These early musicals were more closely aligned with revue stage shows than the operetta, although both operetta and musical comedies continued to thrive in America. During the period that is now referred to as the "Jazz Age" (of the twenties and thirties), the variety shows and musical comedies provided America with many popular tunes that were reproduced in the movies, on the radio, or in clubs. Early musical theater composers such as Cohan, Irving Berlin, and Cole Porter wrote hit songs and then connected them with a loose storyline into a musical, knowing that the popularity of the music would contribute to the success of the show. Plot, character development, or any attempt at meaningful dramatic depth was secondary; songs were flighty and only roughly related to the plot.¹⁶ Composers aimed to write songs that would top the charts and therefore guarantee a profit. Even today, audiences are more familiar with Porter's hit "I've Got You Under My Skin" than the musical that introduced it, *Born to Dance*. Similarly, Berlin's holiday favorite, "White Christmas" --as performed by Bing Crosby--is the best-selling single of all time, though it was actually written for the little-remembered 1942 movie musical *Holiday Inn*.¹⁷ There were, however, exceptions to these mass-produced musical comedies, as some songwriting teams did attempt to assimilate meaningful and related songs into the dramatic action.

¹⁵ Everett and Laird, *Cambridge*, 55.

¹⁶ Citron, *Sondheim and Lloyd Webber*, 4.

¹⁷ Roy Harris Jr., "The Best Selling Record of All, White Christmas and the Reasons it Endures," *Wall Street Journal*, 5 December 2009.

Show Boat was a pivotal example of this, opening in New York on December 27, 1927. It has been described as “perhaps the most successful and influential Broadway musical play ever written.”¹⁸ *Show Boat* was written with music that directly served the drama, a concept that would come to be called “the integrated musical.” Oscar Hammerstein and Jerome Kern teamed up to adapt the 1926 book by Edna Ferber, challenging the traditional expectations of musical structure. Instead of providing the usual racy and flippant entertainment, this show took a serious and relevant approach by directly addressing controversial issues of slavery, miscegenation, unhappy marriages, and gambling. Up to this point, blacks had been ridiculed onstage and were often portrayed as fools or the subjects of tasteless jokes. In *Show Boat*, they were given leading roles, serious relationships, and significant musical moments. Two of the most emotional and noteworthy songs in the show are sung by two of the black main characters: “Ol Man River” by Joe the slave, and “Can’t Help Lovin’ dat Man of Mine” by Julie, the biracial actress on the boat.

Hammerstein, as *Show Boat*’s lyricist, initiated a concept that would carry the American musical theater genre into the coming decades: music would be used in a scene at the moment that emotions were highest.¹⁹ The opening number, “Cotton Blossom,” introduces the black slaves acting as a Greek chorus telling the story of their unjust plight. The *Complete Book of Light Opera* describes the significance of *Show Boat*:

Here we come to a completely new genre – the musical play as distinguished from musical comedy. Now... the play was the thing, and everything else was subservient to that play. Now... came

¹⁸ Ronald Byrnside, Andrew Lamb, and Deane Root, “Jerome Kern,” *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 1980), vol. 10.

¹⁹ Flinn, *Musical!*, 180.

complete integration of song, humor and production numbers into a single and inextricable [sic] artistic entity.²⁰

Despite its experimentation with many of the accepted norms, *Show Boat* was a wild success, suggesting that American composers could take risks without losing the audience.

Different authors have identified both *Show Boat* and *Robin Hood* as the first successful American musical.²¹ Neither of these titles, however, can be pinpointed as the genesis of a new era because they represent isolated events. The American stage was still dominated by countless musical comedies, revues, vaudeville shows, burlesques, and operettas. The 1943 production of *Oklahoma!* by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein ushered in a new era in musical theater, introducing changes in compositional style and affecting audience expectations. Ethan Mordden observed, “*Oklahoma!* did not invent the artistically organic musical. What *Oklahoma!* did was to popularize it.”²² *Show Boat* and a few other predecessors were the instigators, but only with *Oklahoma!* did the rest of American Musical Theater finally follow suit.

The Golden Era: Oklahoma! and Successors

Both Rodgers and Hammerstein were individually successful before their now-famous union. Richard Rodgers had composed many popular musical comedies during the 1920s and 1930s, most notably with lyricist Lorentz Hart; Oscar Hammerstein had

²⁰ Mark Lubbock, "American Musical Theatre: An Introduction," republished from *The Complete Book of Light Opera* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1962), 753–56.

²¹ Gerald Martin Bordman, *American Musical Theatre: A Chronicle* (New York: Oxford University Press Oxford, 2001), 136; Stempel, *Showtime*, 201; Block, *Enchanted Evenings*, 4.

²² Flinn, *Musical!*, 238.

written numerous successful operetta libretti during the early twentieth century.²³ Their first joint musical, *Oklahoma!*, opened on March 31st, 1943, and inaugurated a major shift in the American musical. Geoffrey Block describes *Oklahoma!* as the “Eroica” symphony of the American Musical,” because it marked a definitive shift in the writing of musicals—similar to the way Beethoven’s third symphony (“Eroica”) changed the way that genre was conceived.²⁴

Right from the opening curtain, *Oklahoma!* defied expectations. The musical comedies of that time customarily opened with a large, full cast number complete with showgirls. *Oklahoma!*, however, raised the curtain on a remote farm scene with an old woman churning butter. Instead of a rousing opening song, the first audible sounds are an unaccompanied offstage male solo singing “O What a Beautiful Morning.” The setting of a Midwest prairie was itself a shock, as musical comedies were always set in New York, or at least in an urban environment. The song styles in *Oklahoma!* deviated from the stock forms and harmonies employed by Tin Pan Alley composers,²⁵ and songs were written to serve the setting, the story, and the development of the characters.²⁶ The songs in *Oklahoma!* utilize folk-like melodies reminiscent of simpler times: both “Oklahoma!” and “The Farmer and the Cowhand” are based on hoedown rhythms, “Kansas City” is a two step, and “Surrey with the Fringe on Top” is similar to the cadence of a horse’s trot.²⁷

²³ Stempel, *Showtime*, 299.

²⁴ Block, *Enchanted Evenings*, 163.

²⁵ A description of these forms is included at the end of the chapter.

²⁶ Stempel, *Showtime*, 302.

²⁷ Flinn, *Musical!*, 406.

In addition to a score based directly on the plot, *Oklahoma!* also achieved ‘total integration’ for a musical by using a choreographer for the first time.²⁸ Agnes DeMille incorporated dance numbers that accurately reflected the plot, setting, and characters, including a fourteen-minute ballet. The many lasting and unprecedented innovations in *Oklahoma!* include the importance of the story, the idea of songs growing seamlessly out of the plot and characters, the complexity of strong female characters, the use of lengthy musical scenes, the striking simplicity of the opening, an ‘almost love song’, the narrative use of multiple dance styles, and the forthright approach to moral and social issues.²⁹

The success of *Oklahoma!* was significant to such an extent that many have come to describe American musical theater history in terms of “before *Oklahoma!*” and “after *Oklahoma!*”³⁰ *Oklahoma!* broke all existing Broadway box office records up to that time.³¹ The newly popular collaboration of Rodgers and Hammerstein changed the face of American musical theater with their subsequent blockbusters: *Carousel* (1945), *South Pacific* (1949), *The King and I* (1951), and *The Sound of Music* (1959).³² By 1954, Rodgers and Hammerstein were household names, evidenced by this short dialogue from the feature film *White Christmas* (1954) about two major fictional producers, Bob Wallace and Phil Davis:

²⁸ Total integration refers to every aspect of the drama being tied to the story, including music, lyrics, set, stage direction, and dance, Stempel, *Showtime*, 564.

²⁹ There are also instances of the ‘almost love song’ prior to Rodger and Hammerstein, such as “Make Believe” from *Showboat*, Everett and Laird, *Cambridge*, 151.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, although Miles Krueger gives the same significance to *Show Boat*, see Block, *Enchanted Evenings*, 4.

³¹ Corine Naden, *The Golden Age of American Musical Theater* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2011), 20.

³² The number of performances of each respective original Broadway run attests to their overall success: *Oklahoma!*, 2,212; *Carousel*, 890; *The King and I*, 1,246; *South Pacific*, 1,925; *The Sound of Music*, 1,443.

Phil: I don't know what [Bob's] up to, but he's got that Rodgers and Hammerstein look again.

Betty: Is that bad?

Phil: Not bad, but always expensive.³³

It is widely recognized that *Oklahoma!*'s initial success was due in part to its cultivation of a sense of optimism during a difficult time of war. *Oklahoma!* fed into nostalgia and patriotic American values during World War II.³⁴ The country was also trying to recover from a decade ravaged by the Great Depression.³⁵ Ann Sears says of this powerful message: "*Oklahoma!*'s celebration of the indomitable pioneer spirit was just what Americans needed to hear."³⁶ The timing was perfect, as 1943 marked a favorable turning point for America in World War II.³⁷ American theatergoers were longing for a wholesome, patriotic form of art that embodied their homeland and sense of freedom, and Rodgers and Hammerstein's productions filled this desire.

Rodgers and Hammerstein's impressive ability to interweave story and music produced a demand for the "integrated musical" or "book musical."³⁸ These successful shows established a new style of theater that would remain intact for decades, proving that writers could deviate from the expected norms with positive results. They also demonstrated that a show could be a success without leaning on famous stars in the lead roles: *Oklahoma!* featured previously unknown, fresh actors who simply fit the parts well.

³³ Irving Berlin, *White Christmas* [1954], DVD, Paramount Pictures.

³⁴ Everett and Laird, *Cambridge*, 164.

³⁵ Stempel, *Showtime*, 311.

³⁶ Everett and Laird, *Cambridge*, 154.

³⁷ Stempel, *Showtime*, 311.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 243.

The musical expectations set forth with *Oklahoma!* were adopted over the next fifteen years by various composer/librettist teams.³⁹ Historians commonly describe this era of musical theater as “The Golden Age”—beginning with *Oklahoma!* in 1943 and ending with *Fiddler on the Roof* in 1964.⁴⁰ Musicals from the Golden Age feature many of the changes initiated by Rodgers and Hammerstein. They often include long musical scenes that are revived later in the form of a *reprise* to connect dramatic ideas, and frequent uses of leitmotifs serve the same purpose.⁴¹ Dance was important; production teams always included a choreographer who incorporated dramatically appropriate, stylized numbers, and often a ballet. Women were given strong roles with songs to reflect the depth of their character.

Rodgers and Hammerstein popularized the “almost love song,” a song in which two characters are clearly enamored with each other but never quite say so. Examples of this include “If I Loved You,” from *Carousel*, and “People Will Say We’re in Love” from *Oklahoma!*. Musical numbers were often added to accentuate the qualities of a character: “Bali H’ai,” from *South Pacific*; “I Cain’t Say No,” from *Oklahoma*; and “A Puzzlement,” from *The King and I*. The most successful shows from this era adapted these same techniques—*The Music Man* (Wilson, 1957), *My Fair Lady* (Lerner and Lowe, 1956), *Bye Bye Birdie* (Strouse, 1960), *How to Succeed in Business Without Really*

³⁹ Lerner and Lowe (*Brigadoon*, 1947; *My Fair Lady*, 1956; *Camelot*, 1960), Loesser and Lowe (*Guys and Dolls*, 1950), Adler and Ross (*The Pajama Game*, 1954; *Damn Yankees*, 1955) and Harnick and Bock (*She Loves Me*, 1963, *Fiddler on the Roof*, 1964). Cy Coleman was a prolific composer with various librettists (*Sweet Charity*, 1964 with Dorothy Fields, *Barnum*, 1980 with Michael Stewart).

⁴⁰ Although Corinne J. Naden identifies the end of the Golden Age with Lerner and Lane’s *On a Clear Day You Can See Forever* in 1965, see Stempel, *Showtime*, 344.

⁴¹ A *leitmotif* is a short musical phrase that recurs frequently throughout a long work. It often is related to a specific character or idea.

Trying (Loesser, 1961), *Gypsy* (Sondheim and Styne, 1962), *Funny Girl* (Merill and Styne, 1964), *Hello Dolly!* (Herman, 1964)—and continue to be successful to this day.

Another landmark work towards the end of the Golden Age was *West Side Story* (1957), a collaborative effort by Jerome Robbins (director and choreographer), Arthur Laurents (librettist), Leonard Bernstein (composer), and Stephen Sondheim (lyricist). Robbins assembled these artistic giants to create an integrated production. He commented, “Why couldn’t we...bring our crafts and talents to a musical...why did Lenny [Bernstein] have to write an opera, Arthur a play, me a ballet? Why couldn’t we bring our talents together?”⁴² *West Side Story* adapted Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* for a modern audience. Robbins followed the Rodgers and Hammerstein idea of using a dream ballet as its opening number, and established a rich connection between physical movement and the dramatic narrative through his unique choreography style.⁴³

West Side Story premiered on Broadway in 1957 and was a moderate success. Criticism was mostly favorable and audience reception was good, but not comparable to its popularity today.⁴⁴ In his *New York Times* review, Brooks Atkinson wrote that in “the hostility and suspicion between the gangs...Mr. Robbins has found the patterns of movement that express these parts of the story. The subject is not beautiful. But what *West Side Story* draws out of it is beautiful.”⁴⁵ *West Side Story* lost all the major awards

⁴² Citron, *Sondheim and Lloyd Webber*, 83.

⁴³ Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *Carousel* begins with a dream ballet. Block, *Enchanted Evenings*, 246.

⁴⁴ Citron, *Sondheim and Lloyd Webber*, 83.

⁴⁵ Suskin, *Opening Night on Broadway*, 695.

at the Tony's and the Drama Critics awards to *The Music Man*.⁴⁶ The Academy Award-winning film was released in 1961.

With a rise in popularity of musicals during the Golden Age, productions became bigger and more expensive. Ticket costs rose rapidly, making the theater less accessible to the middle class it had once attracted. The cost of a seat for *Oklahoma!* in 1943 was \$4.40; by 1989 it cost \$55.00 a seat to see *Jerome Robbins' Broadway*. This exorbitant increase becomes clear when compared to the rise in cost to see a movie during that same time period: \$1.10 to \$7.50.⁴⁷ Since the Golden Age, the Broadway musical has become a luxury experience.

Opera was still the favored stage genre among the educated music community. With the rise in popularity of the operetta, classical composers such as Kurt Weill, Gian Carlo Menotti, and Leonard Bernstein started to show an interest in 'lighter' operatic works with spoken dialogue. Weill's notes to his musical *Street Scene* (1946) described the work as "a musical play of operatic proportions," and an attempt to bridge "that vast, unexploited field between grand opera and musical comedy."⁴⁸ As the century progressed, musicians often debated the ever-narrowing differences between the musical and opera. It is generally regarded that a show is an opera if it opens at the Metropolitan Opera, and a musical if it opens on Broadway. Gershwin considered *Porgy and Bess* an opera, but it opened on Broadway in 1935, and was not performed at the Metropolitan Opera until 1985.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Citron, *Sondheim and Lloyd Webber*, 83.

⁴⁷ Suskin, *Opening Night on Broadway*, 13.

⁴⁸ *Street Scene*, full vocal score, Chapell, 1981.

⁴⁹ John Ardoin, "The Porgy Debate," <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/gperf/porgy/html/work.html> (2013), accessed 12 October 2013.

Many such crossovers between musicals and opera existed during the Golden Age, including George Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* (1935), Oscar Hammerstein's *Carmen Jones* (1943), and Leonard Bernstein's *Candide* (1956).⁵⁰ Igor Stravinsky even considered opening *The Rake's Progress* (1951) on Broadway instead of at the Metropolitan Opera.⁵¹ As the century progressed, more and more opera composers wrote musical theater works in an attempt to attract a diverse audience.⁵²

Suskin describes the close of the Golden Age as an “abrupt end,” blaming it on the absence of great songwriters.⁵³ The quick decline can also be attributed to events outside of the theater: popular music was, for the first time, moving *away* from the hit songs of musical theater. Rock n' roll had slowly been gaining momentum in America and continued to attract audiences as the theater evolved in the late 1960s, and New York City was also experiencing turbulent times (discussed in Chapter III).

Diversity in the Golden Age

Theater thrived during the Golden Age because it celebrated the American spirit. When *Show Boat* premiered, Jerome Kern took a risk by putting a formerly unrepresented population in leading roles and giving them real stories, including an onstage murder. In *Oklahoma!*, urban audiences were introduced to working class, rural families who faced trials not all that different from their own. In *West Side Story*, racial tensions between Caucasians and Puerto Ricans were sympathetic to minorities. The portrayal of minority characters gave groups that were typically marginalized their own faces and stories, much

⁵⁰ *Carmen Jones* is an Americanized and updated version of Bizet's *Carmen*.

⁵¹ Stempel, *Showtime*, 328.

⁵² More recently, minimalist opera composer John Adams has dabbled in the musical theater genre—in 1995 he opened *I was Looking at the Ceiling and then I saw the Sky* in Berkeley, CA. John Adam's best-known opera is *Nixon in China* (1987).

⁵³ Suskin, *Opening Night*, 11.

different from the minstrel shows and vaudeville acts of the late nineteenth century. America was becoming more diverse and yet more connected, and this was reflected onstage in musical theater.

This focus on inclusion in musical theater can be credited to a number of Jewish musical theater writers. Donald Whittaker III, in *Subversive Aspects of American Musical Theater* (2002), describes the flood of Jewish immigration into the United States during that time. Jews brought their musical styles as well as an interest in the English language, making them candidates to contribute to the evolving New York City music scene.⁵⁴ The list of major Jewish composers and librettists who essentially created the musical theater genre is expansive: Irving Berlin, George and Ira Gershwin, Richard Rodgers, Lorenz Hart, Oscar Hammerstein, Jerome Kern, Kurt Weill, Leonard Bernstein, Betty Comden, Adolph Green, Jerry Ross, Richard Adler, Jerry Bock, Sheldon Harnick, Stephen Sondheim, and many others. Furthermore, many producers and theater owners were also Jewish.⁵⁵

Andrea Most describes the anti-Semitism of the early twentieth century as a facet of general issues of racism in the 1910s and 1920s:

The Jews confronted a dilemma of identity as race emerged as a central topic of concern in America. With so many apparently different racial types populating the country, [some] began to express concern about who was “really” American.”⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Donald Elgan Whittaker, *Subversive Aspects Of American Musical Theater* (Ph.D. Diss., Louisiana State University, 2002), 88.

⁵⁵ David Suisman, *Selling Sounds: The Commercial Revolution in American Music* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2009), 32.

⁵⁶ Most, *Belong to the Land*, 25.

Political and academic leaders were concerned about the infiltration of different nationalities in America. Most goes on to describe the restrictions that were placed on Jewish participation in many aspects of society, to “limit the perceived dilution of American character.”⁵⁷

Though Jews were discouraged from participating in much of American life, they were welcome in the theater—a place considered sinful by Protestants.⁵⁸ Jews found a voice through musical theater, and through their art they created a picture of what it meant to be an outsider in America. Ironically, what emerged was a genre that became known as distinctly and indigenously American. The Jewish elements of the production could only be found in the heritage of its writers: the subject matter often highlighted the plight of a different marginalized group.⁵⁹ It wasn’t until *Fiddler on the Roof* (1964) that Jews wrote a storyline about their own struggles, at a time when America was more prepared to hear it.⁶⁰

Because they had avoided Jewish subjects in the beginning, the presence of Jews in theater went largely unnoticed. Anti-Semitic critics, however, eventually denigrated their work. Many of these critics were of the “highbrow” mentality, and they blamed the Jews for the degraded and cheap nature of the music.⁶¹ David Suisman, in *Selling Sounds, the Commercial Revolution in American Music* (2009) describes that this negative attitude toward Jews did not last long:

⁵⁷ Most, *Belong to the Land*, 25.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 16.

⁵⁹ *Show Boat* (1927), *Babes in Arms*, (1937), and *South Pacific* (1949) serve as other examples.

⁶⁰ Whittaker, *Subversive Aspects*.

⁶¹ Suisman, *Selling Sounds*, 32.

As the social position of popular music and Jews shifted...many later commentators noted the substantial involvement of Jews in the early music business with more equanimity or celebrated it as a unique creative convergence or a parable of assimilation.⁶²

The acceptance of Jews in this medium can be seen as early as the 1927 “talkie” *The Jazz Singer*, starring Al Jolson.⁶³ The film tells the fictional story of Jakie Rabinowitz, a Jewish man who pursues a career as an entertainer despite disapproval from his deeply religious family. Jolson appears in blackface for many scenes, in reference to the minstrel shows that were popular at the time.⁶⁴ In this instance, the blackface also helped hide his Jewish identity. The reception after opening night was overwhelmingly positive due to the frenzy over the first talking movie: the headline of the *Los Angeles Times* review read “Jazz Singer Scores a Hit—Vitaphone and Al Jolson Responsible, Picture Itself Second Rate.”⁶⁵ Regardless, the widespread fame of the movie subversively furthered the acceptance of Jews in theater.

Golden Age Song Forms and Types

The predominant song form in classic American musical theater during the Tin Pan Alley days was AABA, which became the model for songs throughout the Golden Age and beyond. This form is characterized by three verses (A) with a short bridge (B) inserted before the final statement of the verse. Irving Berlin, George Gershwin, and many songwriters of the twenties, thirties, and forties adopted this style in a traditional

⁶² Ibid., 32.

⁶³ “Talkie” referred to movies that were released with live sound, as opposed to the “silent films” that preceded them.

⁶⁴ This is now considered a derogating practice. Stempel, *Showtime*, 57.

⁶⁵ Gerald Schiller, *It Happened in Hollywood: Remarkable Events that Shaped History* (Guilford, CT: Morris Book Publishing, 2010), 50.

thirty-two bar format.⁶⁶ The form was so prevalent that early audiences could easily predict what would happen next.⁶⁷ In this form, each of the four sections contains eight bars, described as 8-8-8-8. “Over the Rainbow” by Harold Arlen and E.Y. Harburg from the 1939 movie *The Wizard of Oz* is an example of this form.

The thirty-two bar AABA form was used extensively throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first in all areas of songwriting, including jazz, popular, country, gospel, Christian, and film. The Beatles used the form in many songs, including “A Hard Day’s Night,” “Ticket to Ride,” “Yesterday,” and “Hey Jude.” Sondheim’s “Send in the Clowns” is written in AABA form, but the phrases are distributed 6-6-9-8, over twenty-eight total bars. The pervasive nature of this form in modern popular songwriting cannot be understated: Disney’s “Let it Go” from the 2014 animated movie musical *Frozen* is also written in a modified AABA form.

AABA is a popular song form because it prompts recognition, as the A section is heard numerous times. Golden Age musicals also reuse songs that appear in the first act later in the show as reprises, adding to their familiarity. At the close of the show, audience members have heard the major themes enough times to leave the theater with the tunes in their heads.

Although AABA song form was prevalent, consistent song *types* were less specific in the Golden Age. Denny Flinn identifies the major song types that comprise the

⁶⁶ It was rumored that Irving Berlin had manufactured a machine that could create a thirty-two bar song with conventional harmonies. Willifred Mellers, *Music in a New Found Land: Themes and Developments in the History of the American Musical* (London: Barrie & Rocloff, 1964), 387.

⁶⁷ Jon Fitzgerald, "Lennon-McCartney and the 'middle eight'," *Popular Music & Society* XX/4 (Winter 1996), 4.

Golden Age American musical in his book, *Musical! A Grand Tour* (1997).⁶⁸ These song types include the overture, the opening number, the “I want” song, the nine o’clock number, the male chorus number, the soliloquy, the list song, the show-within-the-show,⁶⁹ the song and dance, the pure dance number, the barbershop quartet, the duet, the comic song, the first act finale, the unusual and clever, the flat out showstopper, the talk song, the eleven o’clock number, the scene change song, and the ballad.⁷⁰ Beyond Flinn’s efforts, there is little evidence of attempts to codify song type.

One of the more prevalent song types is the “I want” song. These songs often include the lyric “I want,” “I wish,” or “I need,” and occur early in the first act. In *The Unsinkable Molly Brown* (1960), Molly sings of her future affluence in “I Ain’t Down Yet.” Eliza Doolittle has similar aspirations in “Wouldn’t it be Lovely” from *My Fair Lady* (1956). “I want” songs continue to be used in book musicals in the twenty-first century.

A second popular song type is the eleven o’clock number. The eleven o’clock number is named for the time of night that this song typically occurs after an eight o’clock curtain: towards the end of the second act, before the plot is resolved but it is clear that the end is near. The eleven o’clock number signifies a moment of realization or determination for a main character. One example of this song type is in *My Fair Lady* (1956), when Henry Higgins realizes he is actually in love with Eliza Doolittle in the song “I’ve Grown Accustomed To Her Face.” A similar moment is found in *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* (1961), when Finch tells his employers that

⁶⁸ Flinn, *Musical!*, 417.

⁶⁹ Examples of this include “The Small House of Uncle Thomas,” from *The King and I*, “Broadway Melody” from *Singin’ in the Rain*, and “Growltiger’s Last Stand,” from *Cats*.

⁷⁰ Flinn, *Musical!*, 417.

they are like a family to him in “Brotherhood of Man.” Another example is from Jerry Herman’s *Mame* (1966), when Auntie Mame recognizes the depth of her mother-like concern for Patrick in the song “If He Walked Into My Life.”

Not all of Flinn’s song types are found in every musical, and many songs fall into more than one category. For example, “Sit Down, You’re Rockin’ the Boat,” from the musical *Guys and Dolls* could be considered both the showstopper and the eleven o’clock number. Flinn confirms the importance of a song to advance the drama, addressing the power of the right song within the dramatic context: “you don’t get goose bumps when Barry Manilow just walks out and sings “What I Did for Love.”⁷¹ The placement within the plot is key in the potential for emotional power.

The Golden Age did much to popularize the song forms and types that would come to define classic American musical theater. As the genre progressed into the 1960s and beyond, remnants of these musical ideas can be found even as significant style changes took place. Chapter III explores the way in which Jason Robert Brown and other composers beyond the Golden Age inherited these stylistic norms.

⁷¹ Flinn, *Musical!*, 417.

CHAPTER III

HISTORY OF AMERICAN MUSICAL THEATER II: POST GOLDEN ERA-PRESENT

Following the prosperous Golden Era, the American theater scene fell stagnant.¹ In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the country was in a state of skepticism and turmoil, ushered in by the Vietnam War. The baby boomers were young, and interested in mass-produced popular commodities such as albums and movies, not the antiquated, idealistic sentimentality found in classic stage shows. In these uncertain years, only a handful of Rodgers and Hammerstein-esque shows were considered successes.²

The decline in the popularity of new musicals created problems for Broadway. New York City had already experienced urban decline as the middle classes moved to the suburbs following World War II.³ The sexual revolution meant that Times Square and the 42nd Street Theater District—once characterized by bright marquees and glamorous theater stars—became notorious for porn theaters, sex shops, strip clubs, and seedy bars dominated by alcoholics, prostitutes, and drug addicts. Many original Broadway theaters were closed, converted, or destroyed.⁴ Audience interest and ticket sales waned, and with

¹ Everett and Laird, *Cambridge*, 284, and Most, *We Belong to the Land*, 41.

² These include Mitch Leigh and Joe Darion's *Man of LaMancha* (1965), Cy Coleman and Dorothy Field's *Sweet Charity* (1966) and Burt Bacharach and Hal David's *Promises, Promises* (1968).

³ Stempel, *Showtime*, 603.

⁴ Rick Burns, James Sanders and Lisa Ades, *New York: An Illustrated History* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2003), 554.

this steady decline many historians and biographers warned of the potential extinction of American musical theater.⁵ Glenn Litton, in his sequel to Cecil Smith's *Musical Comedy in America* (1950), describes the 1960s and 1970s in chapters respectively titled "Trouble," and "An Uncertain Comeback."⁶ Many felt that the steady degeneration of the Theater District was irreversible, and the prosperity of the Great White Way was a fading memory.⁷

Within this dismal climate, writers attempted to resuscitate the American Musical Theater with new styles and ideas. Two isolated successful shows did appear during these turbulent years: *Hair* and *Godspell*. *Hair* (1968), by James Rado, Gerome Ragni, and Galt MacDermot, hyped the sexual revolution and protested the Vietnam War by glorifying the counter-culture hippie movement. The songs focus on sexual freedom ("Sodomy"), illegal drugs ("Hashish"), and pollution ("Air"), and ends Act One with the cast completely nude. *Hair*'s director Tom O'Horgan describes the show as "a theater form whose demeanor, language, clothing, dance, and even its name accurately describe a social epoch in full explosion."⁸

Godspell (1971), by Stephen Schwartz, uses the Biblical book of Matthew as the libretto and sets Jesus as a hippie with a vanload full of flower children disciples. Backed

⁵ Flinn, *Musical!*

⁶ Glenn Litton, *Musical Comedy in America* (New York: Theater Arts Books, 1981).

⁷ "The Great White Way" is synonymous with Broadway. It was first given that title in 1880 when Broadway Avenue was the first street in the United States to use electrically lighted street lamps. "The Great White Way," online, www.greatwhiteway.com, accessed 1 August 2014.

⁸ Stempel, *Showtime*, 510.

by a 1970's pop psychedelic score,⁹ the show was originally vilified by religious groups but today is used in church settings because of its faithfully Biblical text. Both of these progressive shows are indicative of the shifting American ideals that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. *Hair* and *Godspell* were key in infiltrating the Broadway musical with contemporary styles from popular culture, inviting in new audiences.¹⁰

Broadway's shift from the wholesome, idealistic homeland tradition that was the paradigm of the Golden Age had begun prior to *Hair*. When *West Side Story* opened in 1955, audiences were shocked to witness a murder onstage, as well as the glamorization of gangs. Christina Wakefield explains that *West Side Story* presented a candid reflection of America's social problems, and reveals that musicals don't always need a happy ending, "*West Side Story* faced, for the first time in a musical, the harsh reality that things don't always work out and sometimes hatred has the final say. It's a painful universal truth."¹¹ The awards garnered by the show contributed to its eventual success, despite its controversial beginning.

Shortly after *Hair*, *The Rocky Horror Show* (1973) pushed boundaries even further. With book, music, and lyrics by Richard O'Brien, *Rocky Horror* features the many sexual encounters of a transvestite scientist. The musical was soon adapted into a

⁹ Also known as "acid rock," psychedelic rock is a genre that evolved out of the 1965 movement of hippies to San Francisco. The style is characterized by blues-based improvisations, Middle Eastern harmonies, and Indian instruments. Allan F. Moore, "Psychedelic rock," Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online. (online version; accessed 21 April, 2014), <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/46256>,

¹⁰ Stempel, Showtime, 511.

¹¹ Christina Weakland, "West Side Story: The Musical that Broke the Rules," www.flynncenter.org/blog/2012/11/west-side-story-the-musical-that-broke-the-rules/ (2015), accessed 6 May 2015.

movie, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975), and both versions of the show are often presented at midnight showings for their cult followers.

As the ‘hippie’ era of Musical Theater ran its course, two composers—Stephen Sondheim and Andrew Lloyd Webber—emerged at the forefront. Sondheim offered unique, compelling scores, while Webber provided marketable productions that would eventually resuscitate the Broadway stage and attract audiences in numbers that obliterated all theater attendance and revenue records from the Golden Age. Michael Walsh writes of their effects in 1989:

...no one can deny that [Webber] is today the biggest name in a field whose glories at first glance seem to belong more to the past than the present. The great line of German- and Russian-Jewish composers that dominated Broadway since Irving Berlin seems to be played out, only Stephen Sondheim remains a potent force in the American musical theater.¹²

Walsh goes on to suggest that many attempts at reviving the Golden Age were just “rouging the corpse.”¹³ However, Sondheim and Lloyd Webber were both intentional about creating new American styles of musical theater, resulting in a surge of ticket sales and the attraction of new audiences that continued into the twenty-first century.

Andrew Lloyd Webber and the Megamusical

The most prolific composer of the late twentieth century American musical theater is Andrew Lloyd Webber. His mother taught piano while his father taught at the Royal College of Music and played organ at church. Young Andrew was writing his first tunes at the age of seven.¹⁴ He grew up with an appreciation for many styles: Elvis

¹² Michael Walsh, *Andrew Lloyd Webber* (New York: Harry M. Adams, 1989), 9.

¹³ Walsh, *Andrew Lloyd Webber*, 9.

¹⁴ "Lloyd Webber, Andrew," *Encyclopedia of Popular Music*, 4th ed. Oxford Music Online, (online version; accessed 30 October 2013), www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/epm/38461.

Presley and The Beatles mixed with the classical repertory of Prokofiev, as well as the modern styles of Puccini, Hindemith, Ligeti, and Penderecki.¹⁵ His first notable success was a short work composed for a London school in 1958, a fifteen-minute cantata on the biblical story of Joseph. This cantata went through numerous revisions over the next fifteen years, and opened in its present form as the two-act *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, on London's West End in 1974. This was his second professional blockbuster, just three years after the Broadway debut of his self-proclaimed "pop opera," *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1971), which details the last seven days of Christ's life. The score of *Superstar* shares many of the same rock elements of *Hair*, *Godspell*, and *The Rocky Horror Show*, and is considered a "rock opera."¹⁶ He followed these two productions with some of the most successful musicals of all time; *Evita* (1976), *Cats* (1981), *Starlight Express* (1984), *Phantom of the Opera* (1986), and *Sunset Boulevard* (1993).

Since the close of the Golden Era in 1964, Broadway had suffered from a lack of new material, and this was reflected in its revenue.¹⁷ With the wide success of *Phantom*, Webber ushered American musical theater into a new era with a new genre—the "megamusical." In 1977, Andrew Lloyd Webber and lyricist Tim Rice founded The Really Useful Group, a worldwide network for publicizing Webber's shows. The Really

¹⁵ Ibid., and Everett and Laird, Cambridge Companion, 256.

¹⁶ A "rock opera" is a musical written within the rock n' roll idiom. John, "Rock opera," The New Grove Dictionary of Opera, Oxford Music Online. (online version; accessed 7 May 2015), www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/O008572.

¹⁷ Sternfeld, Megamusical, 20.

Useful Group has offices in London, New York, Los Angeles, Hong Kong, Singapore, Sydney, Basel, and Frankfurt, and also owns large theaters in many of those cities.¹⁸

The Oxford Music Online Dictionary summarizes the importance of Andrew Lloyd Webber and the Really Useful Group: “through the record-breaking length of the runs of his musicals, many now exceeding a decade, Lloyd Webber has been responsible for raising the cultural and commercial profile of the musical worldwide through the 1980s and 1990s.”¹⁹ Webber was knighted in 1992 for his contributions to British theater. As William Everett aptly states, “The diversity, popularity, and longevity of Lloyd Webber’s canon is staggering.”²⁰

Webber’s musical style stretches across the vast array of twentieth century pop music, often combining numerous styles within a single show. *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, the biblical story of Joseph and his rise to fame due to his prophetic dreams, illustrates Webber’s eclectic tastes in full force: he utilizes a country western style (“One More Angel in Heaven”), a calypso (“Benjamin Calypso”), a French *chanson* (“Those Canaan Days”), and an Elvis impersonation (“Song of the King”). The preponderance of familiar styles in his writing has contributed to both his wide fame among audiences as well as strident criticism from scholars.

Another successful composition team of megamusicals is the French duo of lyricist Alain Boublil and composer Claude-Michel Schönberg. Among their highest grossing productions are *Les Misérables* (1980), the French Revolution story of

¹⁸ Everett and Laird, Cambridge Companion, 255.

¹⁹ Callum Ross et al, "Lloyd Webber," Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online. (online version; accessed 15 December 2013), www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/43061pg2.

²⁰ Everett and Laird, Cambridge Companion, 254.

redemption based on the 1862 book by Victor Hugo, and *Miss Saigon* (1989), inspired by Puccini's *La Bohème* and set during the Vietnam War. Of *Les Misérables*, Boublil freely admits that his grand scale melodrama was inspired by Webber's works.²¹

There are a number of characteristics that define the megamusical. Megamusicals originated as a British genre; many of the first were premiered in London's West End.²² Cameron Mackintosh is the British producer responsible for bringing the most lucrative productions from London to New York, including *Les Misérables*, *Phantom of the Opera*, *Cats*, and *Miss Saigon*.²³ Megamusicals are characterized by an exaggeration of every possible dramatic element. They are typically massive in their subject matter: large, epic tales set in the past or an exotic land. For example, *Les Misérables* is set during the French Revolution and *Phantom of the Opera* is set in 1912 Paris. The plots are highly emotional and involve deep-rooted crises, often amid love triangles, forgiveness, and redemption. The locale requires stagecraft and special effects that are impressive, complicated, and expensive, and provides show-stopping elements at the moment the curtain rises.²⁴ *Miss Saigon* is known for the helicopter that lands onstage in the second act. In each performance of *Phantom of the Opera*, the one-ton chandelier in the Paris Opera House comes crashing to the stage from right above the audience.

These musicals also are differentiated by a completely sung-through libretto. The music is a mix of popular styles and musical exoticism: pentatonicism, folk idioms, and modal tonalities exist when the setting invites them. Mass choral numbers accentuate the

²¹ Sternfeld, *Megamusicals*, 326.

²² *Les Misérables*, *Starlight Express*, *Chess*, *Miss Saigon*, and *The Phantom of the Opera* are the most prominent.

²³ Stempel, *Showtime*, 619.

²⁴ Sternfeld, *Megamusical*, 20.

drama and grandeur of the production. With the emphasis on spectacle and the lack of spoken dialogue, megamusicals are often compared to seventeenth century Italian opera or French Grand Opera of the mid-nineteenth century.²⁵

The large-scale nature of megamusicals means these shows require mega-budgets as well. Aggressive promotional advances by The Really Useful Group help create a media “buzz” prior to opening night, allowing most of Webber’s musicals to open already fully funded as a result of advance ticket sales. Producer Mackintosh emerged with a business model that systemized financing, production, marketing, and distribution. Traditionally, investors fund musicals. In the 1920s, a musical could pay back its investors within four weeks of opening, and the remainder of the run was profit. The popularity of the genre had increased so much by the 1950s that a show was often paid for by opening night.²⁶ By the 1980s, the cost of production in New York City had skyrocketed, and it became too expensive to risk losing money on a brand new show. Mackintosh and Webber could guarantee a profit, and therefore investors were eager to finance their work. Nathan Hurwitz’s *A History of the American Musical Theater: No Business Like It* (2014) compares the megamusical to a Hollywood movie hit: “At a time when there was very little room on the movie screen for small, independent films, the only movies booked into the theaters were the big hits.”²⁷

Mackintosh also funded his musicals by turning them into a global business. He could open his shows in London, where they were cheaper to produce, and send multiple

²⁵ Ibid., 4.

²⁶ Nathan Hurwitz, *A History of the American Musical Theater: No Business Like It* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014).

²⁷ Hurwitz, *No Business*, 206.

productions on tour around the world. Larry Stempel calls it another “British Invasion,” saying

A Mackintosh show was no longer just a show but an event, commercially hyped by saturating the media. Mackintosh managed to create and maintain a must-see aura about his shows that kept audiences coming to them despite negative reviews.²⁸

Mackintosh provided a unique business model that allowed megamusicals to be produced on Broadway, and he also made them accessible across the United States and around the world through national tours.

The prevalence of such productions in popular culture is evidenced by the fact that many include popular tunes that transcend their existence onstage. The individual successes of many songs reached an audience beyond that of musical theater. This phenomenon resembles the Irving Berlin and Cole Porter ‘hits’ in the 1920s and 1930s, and George Gershwin’s popular songs of the 1950s and 1960s. Barbara Streisand, Barry Manilow, and Celine Dion have all released lucrative cover recordings of “Memory” from *Cats*.²⁹ “I Dreamed a Dream” from *Les Misérables* has been recorded numerous times, and also was performed at the 1993 inaugural celebration for President Bill Clinton by Aretha Franklin.³⁰ In 2009, Susan Boyle achieved 300 million YouTube hits when she sang the song for the reality TV show, *Britain’s got Talent*.³¹ Other songs from *Les Misérables* have been heard during the 1992 presidential election campaign (“One Day More”), the 2000 Olympic games, and the 2002 World Cup (“Do You Hear the People

²⁸ Stempel, *Showtime*, 627.

²⁹ Sternfeld, *Megamusical*, 237.

³⁰ Mark Kemp, “Aretha Franklin: Biography,” www.rollingstone.com/music/artists/aretha-franklin/biography, accessed 22 July 2014.

³¹ “Living the Dream,” *The Plymouth Evening Herald*, 22 July 2014.

Sing”).³² These stand-alone tunes from megamusicals have once again connected the world of musical theater with popular culture, as ‘hits’ from shows have been doing since the turn of the twentieth century.

Both the longevity and monetary success of megamusicals highlight their contemporary significance. *Phantom of the Opera* is the longest running musical on Broadway; it opened in 1988 and regularly holds a place in Playbill’s weekly list of the top ten grossing musicals, bringing in over a million dollars each week.³³ In 2006, a report of *Phantom*’s earnings indicated that it had grossed more money than any other stage or screen production, exceeding film blockbusters such as *Star Wars*, *Titanic*, and *Avatar*.³⁴ That same year, *Phantom* pushed the current leader, *Cats*, into the second-longest running musical on Broadway. *Cats*’s eighteen-year run, ending in 2000, grossed a total of \$342 million. Film versions of many megamusicals provide another venue for guaranteeing longevity.³⁵ When a musical has received this much publicity and success, the opinions of critics matter very little.

Music scholars are often critical of Webber, usually citing his music as being nothing but ‘pop tunes’ and lacking originality. Denny Flinn, in his Broadway history *Musical!: A Grand Tour: The Rise, Glory, and Fall of an American Institution* (1997) minces few words, accusing Webber of writing “scarce melodies for abysmal librettos

³² Everett and Laird, *Cambridge Companion*, 254.

³³ Statistics available at www.Playbillvault.com, accessed 30 November 2013.

³⁴ The Really Useful Group Website, www.thephantomoftheopera.com/25th-anniversary-site/facts-figures, accessed 30 November 2013.

³⁵ Some examples include *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1973), *Evita* (1996), *Cats* (1998), *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* (1999), *Jesus Christ Superstar* (2000), *The Phantom of the Opera* (2004), and *Les Misérables* (2012).

and expensive, dismally choreographed extravaganzas.”³⁶ By attacking the productions, critics are subtly suggesting that audiences who adore these shows are shallow-minded and ignorant. Considering the magnitude of Webber’s success and still-growing legion of followers, an attack on his audience is an attack on most of the theater-going public. However, such assaults barely make a dent in his worldwide fame.

Oddly, the criticism received by Webber is similar to the reception that Puccini’s operas received from earlier scholars. British opera scholar Julian Budden speculates why this is true: “For many years [Puccini] has remained a victim of his own popularity; hence the resistance to his music in academic circles. The truth is that music that appeals immediately to the public becomes subject to bad imitation, which can cast a murky shadow over the original.”³⁷ Unlike Webber, Puccini was revered in his own time by several of his musical contemporaries, including Schoenberg, Ravel, and Stravinsky.³⁸ Even the *New Grove Dictionary of Music* boldly declares Puccini to be “the greatest composer of Italian Opera after Verdi.”³⁹ While Puccini’s reception is divided, an academic supporter of Webber’s music is harder to find.

A rare scholarly biography of Andrew Lloyd Webber is by his friend and colleague Michael Walsh, a graduate of the Eastman School of Music and a music critic for TIME magazine. Walsh’s *Andrew Lloyd Webber: His Life and Works* (1989)

³⁶ Flinn, *A Grand Tour*, 474.

³⁷ Julian Budden, *Puccini: His Life and Works* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 107.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 107.

³⁹ Gabriella Biagi Ravenni and Michele Girardi, "Puccini," *Grove Music Online*, Oxford Music Online. (online version; accessed April 26, 2014), www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/40280pg5.

announces that it is a serious treatment of the man and his music. He unabashedly describes the distaste that “elite” musicians have toward Webber:

Despite his indisputable box-office prestige....Lloyd Webber repeatedly has seen his works critically disdained. There is even one school of thought that considers Lloyd Webber fundamentally derivative—nearly a plagiarist—who preys on his audience’s ignorance and childish love of spectacle.⁴⁰

This dismal portrayal of his critical reception is somewhat misleading. In reality, his early shows were received with either mixed or slightly favorable reviews among the critics.⁴¹ By the time *Phantom of the Opera* (his most profitable show) opened, it was the established norm for scholars to dislike Webber’s music, and the critics accordingly followed suit. However, no other composer has more thoroughly nullified the critical reviews. Even Walsh admits that Webber does not require a positive review to be successful, describing Webber as the “only critic-proof composer in the world.”⁴² He remains popular and lucrative with unparalleled longevity, despite disdain from scholars and critics.

Stephen Sondheim and the Concept Musical

The form that Rodgers and Hammerstein developed tells a story through character and song; it expands the characters, and the characters therefore cause the things to happen in the story, and it goes song-scene, song-scene, song-scene. I’m very proud of Gypsy, but when it was all over I thought, “that’s the last one of those I want to do. Now let’s try different things.”⁴³ Stephen Sondheim, 1985

Stephen Sondheim grew up just outside of New York City, the next-door neighbor of Oscar Hammerstein. Sondheim spent his childhood and young adult years as

⁴⁰ Walsh, *Andrew Lloyd Webber*, 12.

⁴¹ *Jesus Christ Superstar, Evita, and Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. See Sternfeld, *Megamusical*, 156.

⁴² Walsh, *Andrew Lloyd Webber*, 14.

⁴³ Otis Guernsey, ed., *Broadway Song and Story: Playwrights, Lyricists, Composers Discuss Their Hits* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co, 1985), 229.

the renowned lyricist's apprentice. He later studied composition with composer Milton Babbitt.⁴⁴ Sondheim's first successful production credit, paired with composer Leonard Bernstein, was in 1957 as the lyricist for *West Side Story*. He continued as lyricist for *Gypsy* in 1959, in collaboration with composer Jule Styne. Both shows ran for over 700 performances and were adapted as successful movies in 1961 and 1962, respectively.

Sondheim's first notable success as a composer and librettist came in 1970 with *Company*, credited as the first popular musical that is not driven by a central plot.⁴⁵ Bobby, the lead character, begins the show as an unmarried 35-year-old. His friends try to convince him of the joys of wedded life through a series of vignettes, but in the end he remains single. Beyond that, there is no problem to be resolved or catharsis to be reached. In a narrative sense, nothing important happens. Sondheim identifies a secret metaphor within the show: a comparison between contemporary marriage and Manhattan.⁴⁶ The show is thus marked by a sense of depersonalization and solitude. With this production, Sondheim and director Harold Prince made a 180-degree shift from the "integrated musicals" of Rodgers and Hammerstein where a good story was everything. Now, the storyline was secondary to the deeper meaning.

Company was nominated for twelve Tony awards, winning five: best musical, director, designer, choreographer, author, and lyricist-composer. It was Sondheim's first of many collaborative efforts with director Harold Prince (*Fiddler on the Roof*, *Cabaret*), and launched his tenure as a top-rated composer-lyricist on Broadway. *Company* has been regarded as one of the most significant and influential shows in late-twentieth

⁴⁴ Hallman, *Concept*, 4.

⁴⁵ Stempel, *Showtime*, 532.

⁴⁶ Stempel, *Showtime*, 532.

century American musical theater, as articulated by Eugene Bristow and J. Kevin Butler: “As *Oklahoma!* was the landmark, model, and inspiration for almost all musicals during the three decades that followed its opening, *Company* became the vantage point, prototype, and stimulus for new directions in musical theater of the seventies and eighties.”⁴⁷ This is despite the mixed reviews the production received: Walter Kerr noted that *Company* was well constructed but “On the whole I had difficulty... empathizing.”⁴⁸

This “new direction” described by Bristow and Butler referred to Sondheim’s creation of a new musical genre: the concept musical. One individual creates an artistic vision that controls and guides every aspect of the production. There is still a creative team working together, but all elements of the music, thematic material, and visual presentation are integrated to suggest an image or idea instead of a story. The emphasis is not multileveled plots based on story conflict and resolution, but on presenting issues and raising questions that are not answered. There is typically a metaphor within the drama, resulting in a lack of closure. Concept musicals contain no big song and dance numbers, or spectacle for its own sake, but use small casts and simple staging. Production costs, therefore, are also minimized.

Dan Cartmell confirms that the concept is what shapes the writing of the libretto, music, and lyrics.⁴⁹ Each of these three elements is just as central as the dialogue to the concept of the show. In fact, Cartmell also finds that concept musicals have more music

⁴⁷ Eugene Bristow and Kevin Butler, “*Company*: About face! The show that revolutionized the American musical,” *American Music* V/3 (1987), 253.

⁴⁸ Citron, *Sondheim and Lloyd Webber*, 172.

⁴⁹ Dan Cartmell, *Stephen Sondheim and the Concept Musical* (Ph.D. Diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 1983), 104.

throughout than book musicals, and that song and dance carry the weight of the show.⁵⁰

After *Company*, Sondheim continued to manipulate expectations over the next twenty years with eight more shows.⁵¹ Of these, *A Little Night Music*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Sunday in the Park with George*, and *Into the Woods* have all been made into major motion pictures.

Scholars have come to recognize that Sondheim's style codified the definition of a 'concept musical.' Hallman and others identify the concept musical as an attempt to fulfill the German Romantic idea of *Gesamkunstwerk*, or "total art" created by Richard Wagner in his music dramas of the late nineteenth century.⁵² In a *New York Times* review of Harold Prince's concept musical *Zorba* (1968), drama critic Clive Barnes claims that the unity was derived from Wagner: "Mr. Prince has learned the principal of the musical as a *Gesamkunstwerk*, the Wagnerian ideal of theatrical unity where every part plays its role in the whole."⁵³ This idea of 'concept musical' is often overgeneralized and misused, but it is useful as a descriptor of Sondheim's unique style.

There is disagreement among scholars as to the true genesis of the concept musical. Scott McMillan identifies the first example of a concept musical as John Kander and Fred Ebb's *Cabaret* (1966), in which pre-World War II German debauchery is represented through metaphor as a German cabaret.⁵⁴ Geoffrey Block suggests that these shows began even earlier: "[*Fiddler on the Roof* is] arguably the first full-fledged concept

⁵⁰ Cartmell, *Concept Musical*, 101.

⁵¹ *Follies* (1971), *A Little Night Music* (1973), *Pacific Overtures* (1976), *Sweeney Todd* (1979), *Merrily We Roll Along* (1981), *Sunday in the Park with George* (1984), *Into the Woods* (1987), and *Assassins* (1990).

⁵² Wagner's music dramas, however, contain spectacle. Cartmell, *Concept Musical*, 101; Banfield, *Sondheim's Broadway Musicals*, 147.

⁵³ Huber, *Stephen Sondheim*, 10.

⁵⁴ Scott McMillin, *The Musical as Drama* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 23.

musical of the post Rodgers and Hammerstein era...when the show-opener “Tradition” became, in addition to a song, the embodiment of an overriding idea (rather than an action) that could unify and conceptualize a show.”⁵⁵ No matter what the true genesis, there was a clear shift in the definition of musical theater from the Golden Age to the later twentieth century.

A closer look at the production team behind most of the major concept musicals reveals a single common denominator. Director Harold Prince may be regarded as the true instigator behind the move towards the genre in the twentieth century. The first show that Prince produced and directed was *She Loves Me* in 1963, with a score by Jerry Bock and Sheldon Harnick (the team who later wrote *Fiddler on the Roof*), and he directed all the aforementioned concept musicals past the Golden Age.⁵⁶ Prince was not concerned with presenting an all-star cast or writing song ‘hits,’ but focused instead on “how good the show is.”⁵⁷

Denny Flinn recognizes that, although the concept musical is artistically valuable and thought provoking, it will never truly be a blockbuster:

Mass audiences simply are uncomfortable with this kind of theater. Their first choice is a happy ending and their second is at least a clear one. The most successful musicals avoid reality, or translate it to another time or place that allows comfortable displacement.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Block, *Enchanted Evenings*, 278.

⁵⁶ *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Cabaret*, *Company*, *Follies*, *A Little Night Music*, *Pacific Overtures*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Merrily We Roll Along*; he also served as producer of *West Side Story*. Prince later directed Webber’s *Evita* and *The Phantom of the Opera*. Citron, *Sondheim and Lloyd Webber*, 157.

⁵⁷ Citron, *Sondheim and Lloyd Webber*, 158.

⁵⁸ Flinn, *Musical!*, 439.

Flinn believes that audiences simply want to escape from everyday situations into a world where “happily ever after” is guaranteed. Flinn goes on to describe the concept musical as: “art, and, as Sondheim himself proposes in *Sunday in the Park with George*, art doesn’t sell.”⁵⁹ Flinn asserts that “concept” musicals will never be the most commercially successful shows.

This philosophy explains why, although Sondheim is highly favored among high art critics, musicians, and theatergoers alike, he has never produced any major box office hits. The original Broadway runs of most of his shows have shown limited financial success due to the high costs of creating, producing, and maintaining a show.⁶⁰ His longevity and acclaim has come after each Broadway run, as the originality and depth of his music has only gained momentum over time.⁶¹

The Concept Musical and the Megamusical—Conclusions

While Stephen Sondheim has been awarded and praised for his compositional style, Andrew Lloyd Webber has simultaneously enlarged Broadway’s audience base for the last three decades of the twentieth century. They share the same birthday (March 22nd, although Sondheim is eighteen years older) and admit to being good friends. At one time there was talk of them working together on a musical.⁶² Sondheim’s *Into the Woods* opened two months before Webber’s *Phantom of the Opera*, and ended up taking home the coveted 1988 Tony Award for best score/book. *Phantom* won for best musical, director, lead actor, and a handful of technical awards. They have both received Kennedy

⁵⁹ Flinn, *Musical!*, 439.

⁶⁰ Friedman, “Sondheim,” 2.

⁶¹ Stempel, *Showtime*, 551.

⁶² Michael Riedel, “Musical Theater Icons Ought to Tackle James Bond Movie,” *New York Post*, 13 May 2014.

Center Honors (Sondheim in 1993 and Webber in 2006). The Kennedy Center website describes Webber as “the most successful composer of our time.”⁶³ A true comparison of which composer has contributed more to the culture of contemporary theater is difficult because of the disparity between their individual styles and measures of success. Both have managed to contribute ‘hit’ songs to popular culture, although Webber’s outnumber those by Sondheim.

While Webber’s megamusicals have achieved impressive box office statistics, Sondheim’s less lengthy show runs do not diminish his contributions. Sondheim attributes his difficulty in reaching mass audiences to the progressive nature of his music. He describes his own work as “caviar,” saying “[my music] is too unexpected to sustain itself very firmly in the commercial theater. You may all be surprised to learn that *West Side Story* was not a smash hit [when it opened]...it was just a little too unexpected.”⁶⁴ Sondheim prizes his work as being revolutionary, unpredictable, and leaving audiences thoughtful rather than raving. Lyricist Sheldon Harnick (*She Loves Me*, *Fiddler on the Roof*) agrees that audiences simply aren’t ready to accept that which they find the most stimulating: “So often the opera that makes a tremendous musical smash and reaches the audience its first night is dead a couple of years later. It’s already in the audience’s ears—they’ve heard it before and that’s why they respond to it.”⁶⁵ This explains the limits of Sondheim’s success, but not the persistence of Webber’s. While his megamusicals are all described as having “smash “ openings, many are reaching their thirty- and forty-year anniversaries with no sense of losing momentum.

⁶³ Kennedy Center Artist Biographies. (online version; accessed 4 November 2013), www.kennedy-center.org/explorer/artists/?entity_id=16264.

⁶⁴ Guernsey, Song and Story, 228.

⁶⁵ Guernsey, Song and Story, 327.

Both Stephen Sondheim and Andrew Lloyd Webber revived Broadway after the dismal period of the 1960s and 1970s. American theatergoers responded to both the concept musical and the megamusical, and the international interest endures to this day. Yet, original American musical theater productions waned overall during the decades of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Broadway was alive with Andrew Lloyd Webber and Stephen Sondheim, as well as revivals of the Golden Age, but new shows by other innovative composers were rare or nonexistent. In the 1994-95 theater season, only two new musicals were written.⁶⁶ It was during the late 1990s that American Broadway composers began to find a voice of their own with a modern style: combining the proven successes from the concept musicals and the megamusicals of the prior decades. Denny Flinn concludes his history of the American musical theater with a half-hearted prediction in 1996: “After two decades of domination by heavy-handed entertainment without substance, style, or sense, perhaps the American musical theater will still be here tomorrow—alive and well and shining.”⁶⁷ Flinn proved to be right, as the following decades produced an abundance of fresh ideas and new composers who would engage the American theater public.

The Last Twenty Years

The American musical theater scene since 1996 has continued to flourish. There is no shortage of an audience for the forty official Broadway Theaters that line the theater district in midtown Manhattan. This is despite the high expense: a single ticket with

⁶⁶ Flinn, *Musical!*, 453.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 495.

prime seating can cost almost \$400, and even the cheap seats are at least \$80.⁶⁸

Broadway is a melting pot—a wide variety of new shows appealing to numerous groups of people. Megamusicals are not as common as they once were, although *Wicked* (2003) by Stephen Schwartz could be considered a megamusical.

Wicked opened on Broadway on October 30, 2003 and has not yet closed; thus it cannot be performed at any other professional or amateur theater. Regardless, virtually every theater buff has seen it, thanks to numerous national tours and a widely popular Original Broadway Cast Recording. Celebrating its 10th year on Broadway in October 2013, *Wicked* has become a common pop icon. In 2006, it broke the Broadway weekly box office record for any show, and continues to break that record regularly; it breaks similar records in every city it visits.⁶⁹ Over 30 million people around the world have seen *Wicked*, and it has become a household name even among non-theatrical circles.

Wicked is based on the 1995 novel of the same name by Gregory Macguire. The book tells the story of the Witch of the West before she became the famed wicked witch of the beloved 1900 novel *The Wizard of Oz* by L. Frank Baum. Stephen Schwartz, who first made a name for himself with *Godspell* in the 1970s and has since teamed up as lyricist with Leonard Bernstein and Alan Menken, wrote the book and the lyrics.⁷⁰ Many themes emerge through the musical, including capitalism, political upheaval, and repression of the underprivileged. *Wicked* displays many properties of a megamusical:

⁶⁸ The cost of one ticket with premium seating to the 2014 revival of *Les Misérables* is \$371.25, ticket information available at boxoffice.broadway.com, accessed 18 May 2014.

⁶⁹ Andrew Gans, "Wicked Breaks Record for Highest-Grossing Week in Broadway History," www.playbill.com/news/article/wicked-breaks-record-for-highest-grossing-week-in-broadway-history-174871 (2011), accessed 9 December 2013.

⁷⁰ Everett and Laird, Cambridge, 348.

large cast, epic plot, and extravagant scenery. It also has a book plot that resolves all conflicts in a conclusive, feel-good ending.

Disney productions have become popular in recent years, including *Beauty and the Beast* (1994), *The Lion King* (2006), *Tarzan* (2006), *The Little Mermaid* (2008), *Newsies* (2012), and *Aladdin* (2014). These musicals were all originally conceived as children's movies, and contain many elements from the megamusical, such as an epic plot and large casts.⁷¹ Children's movies are a safe way for producers to guarantee a box office hit, for they draw upon the nostalgic appeal proven to attract American audiences. Kathryn Edney's "*Gliding Through Our Memories:*" *The Performance of Nostalgia in Musical Theater* (2009) describes this trend. Edney's premise is that the American desire for nostalgia in art has been the driving force in many musicals, including *Oklahoma!* (1943), *Assassins* (1990), *The Producers* (2001), and *Hairspray* (2002).⁷²

On the other end of the spectrum, there is a move away from "happily-ever-after" stories. Many composers are attracting theater aficionados with a more "Sondheimesque" approach, writing modern scores and experimenting with controversial subject matter. These shows often feature a small cast and minimal staging, similar to the concept musicals of the 1970s. Examples include *Spring Awakening* (2006), a story about the exploration of sexuality among teenagers; and *Next to Normal* (2008), which deals transparently with drug abuse and suicide. The result is a genre somewhere between book musical and concept musical; there is a plot, but also an emphasis on metaphor.

⁷¹ Stempel, *Showtime*, 631.

⁷² Kathryn Edney, "*Gliding through our Memories:*" *The Performance of Nostalgia in American Musical Theater* (Ph.D. Diss., Michigan State University, 2009).

A handful of companies are dedicated to the performance of these serious new works: the Joseph Papp Public Theater, Playwrights Horizons, and Lincoln Center Theater.⁷³ Critics refer to the successful composers that come out of these programs (and others like them) as “sons of Sondheim.” Larry Stempel, in his 2010 history *Showtime*, identifies five of these composers as an upcoming “Mighty Handful” of musical theater: Ricky Ian Gordon (b. 1956), Jeanine Tesori (b. 1961), Michael John LaChiusa (b. 1962), Adam Guettel (b. 1964), and Jason Robert Brown (b. 1970).⁷⁴ These composers are compared to Sondheim because they write new works that are innovative and progressive. Such musicals are praised by scholars and critics, and often provide a musical score that is both aesthetically pleasing and intellectually stimulating. They often use non-traditional storytelling methods, and many use small casts in intimate settings. Some musicals by these composers enjoy decent longevity, but many do not last.

Many argue that the megamusicals and “happily ever after” stories exist solely for mass entertainment. These shows are typically built from recycled ideas that feed into the expectations of popular culture.⁷⁵ Many critics point to the musicals of Andrew Lloyd Webber—*Phantom of the Opera*, *Cats*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*—as an embodiment of this principle in the late twentieth century.

In 2005, New York University professor and musical theater composer Michael John LaChiusa (known for *The Wild Party*; he is described as a well-known disciple of

⁷³ Stempel, *Showtime*, 676.

⁷⁴ “Mighty Handful” was the official title given to five major classical Russian composers of the late nineteenth century: Mily Balakirev, César Cui, Modest Mussorgsky, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov and Alexander Borodin. Stempel, *Showtime* 677.

⁷⁵ Stempel, *Showtime*, 682.

Sondheim⁷⁶) wrote a controversial article in *Opera News* titled “The Great Gray Way,” where he declared that the true American Musical is dead. He claims that recent commercially successful productions that appeal to the general public’s current tastes are simply “faux musicals:”

The creators of these shows set out to make musicals based on formulae, and they delivered. But as facsimiles of the real thing, they do very nicely - and the box-office receipts prove that. All sense of invention and craft is abandoned in favor of delivering what the audience thinks a musical should deliver.⁷⁷

These musicals are produced regularly because they are certain to garner a large profit.⁷⁸ Consequently, few innovative or risky musicals make it to Broadway, but are often presented Off-Broadway or Off-Off-Broadway. Flinn agrees with LaChiusa that modern audiences prefer to be mindlessly entertained rather than challenged.⁷⁹ LaChiusa affirms that this scarcity stems from pressure to perform well at the box office. “The Great White Way has always been about the green,” he writes. “Today, getting the green means corporate sponsorship, which means playing it safe.”⁸⁰ According to LaChiusa’s definition, faux musicals tend to follow expected constructs of storytelling, with entertainment as their primary goal. This could also be said of many of the more popular movies produced by Hollywood.

Parodies, Jukebox Musicals, and Revivals

There are other trending genres in current musical theater: the jukebox musical, the parody musical, and the revival. A jukebox musical is a catalogue of songs by a well-

⁷⁶ John Heilpern, "Worried about the War? Why Not Forget Your Troubles at Little Fish; Michael John LaChiusa is a Well-Known Disciple of Stephen Sondheim, but that's No Excuse," *The New York Observer*, 3 March 2003, 17.

⁷⁷ LaChiusa, “The Great Gray Way.”

⁷⁸ Stempel, *Showtime*, 681.

⁷⁹ Flinn, *Musical!*, 453.

⁸⁰ LaChiusa, “The Great Gray Way.”

known pop composer or group that are then inserted into a story.⁸¹ This concept is a return to the shows from the 1920s-1930s that built a story around a group of songs by a single composer.⁸² This genre was ushered into popularity by *Mamma Mia!* (1999), a musical built around songs by the Swedish pop group, ABBA. *Movin' Out* (2002), featuring the music of Billy Joel, and *Good Vibrations* (2005), featuring the songs of the Beach Boys, are further examples of this genre.⁸³

Parody musicals make fun of the musical theater genre. The main premise of these shows is that musicals are unbelievable, ridiculous, and even stupid. *Avenue Q* (2002) critiques both musicals and the popular kids' show, *Sesame Street*, by using puppets in adult situations.⁸⁴ *Spamalot* (2005) makes fun of the Arthurian legend as well as musical song forms. In "The Song that Goes Like This," there are three modulations within the song as the actors comment on formulas and expectations within a typical Broadway love duet.⁸⁵ *Forbidden Broadway* (1982), [title of show]⁸⁶ (2004), *Curtains* (2007), and *Book of Mormon* (2011) are further examples of parody musicals. Ironically, many of these musicals have enjoyed long runs and high grosses.⁸⁷

Urinetown is a unique parody musical; it is one of the few productions not based on prior source material. It opened on September 20th, 2001 on Broadway, a week later than scheduled due to the events of September 11th. The critical reception was

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² This includes composers such as Irving Berlin and Cole Porter.

⁸³ Stempel, *Showtime*, 639.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 670.

⁸⁵ John Du Prez and Eric Idle, "The Song that Goes Like This," *Monty Python's Spamalot, Piano Vocal Selections*, (Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard, 2005), 25-30.

⁸⁶ The lack of an actual title is part of the parody.

⁸⁷ www.playbillvault.com, accessed 24 April 2014.

overwhelmingly positive: the show garnered numerous awards⁸⁸ and many national and international tours followed.⁸⁹ *Urinetown* is a political satire that openly mocks the idea that musical theater is always happy-go-lucky. This is displayed through a conversation between Officer Lockstock and his young friend, Little Sally. The pair serves as co-narrators of the show:

LS: "Oh, I guess you don't want to overload them with too much exposition, huh."

OL: "Everything in its time, Little Sally...nothing can kill a show like too much exposition."

LS: "How about bad subject matter? Or a bad title, even? That could kill a show pretty good."⁹⁰

The irony of the last line is intentional, as marketing such an unpleasant title presented *Urinetown* some difficulty. The show deliberately shattered audiences' expectations that all musicals must end happily. Officer Lockstock specifically states in Act II, "This is *not* a happy musical," to which Little Sally replies, "but the music's so happy!"⁹¹ Lockstock agrees.

Urinetown's score is comprised of songs in various styles that are meant to remind audiences of past musical blockbusters. The "Overture" is a clear derivation of Kurt Weill's *Threepenny Opera*. "Act 1 Finale" is a call to revolution in the style of *Les Misérables*'s "One Day More," the title number "Urinetown" uses Jewish dance music

⁸⁸ *Urinetown* was nominated for ten Tony awards and was awarded three: Best Book, Best Original Score, and Best Direction. It also received ten Drama Desk Awards and an Outer Critics Circle Award. www.mtishows.com, accessed 20 May 2014.

⁸⁹ www.mtishows.com, accessed 20 May 2014.

⁹⁰ *Urinetown* script.

⁹¹ Warren Hoffman, *The Great White Way: Race and the Broadway Musical* (Warren Hoffman, 2014).

reminiscent of *Fiddler on the Roof*, and “Snuff that Girl” is a rumble call similar to that of the Jets in *West Side Story*.⁹²

There is yet another continuing trend within the American theater scene, the revival. Early classics have been reborn almost as often as the musical has been around. In the 1990s, revivals of old Broadway musicals began to outnumber productions of new ones.⁹³ Modern versions usually try to put a new interpretation into the classic, sometimes through changes to the book and score. A 2009 revival of the original *Guys and Dolls* (1955) show-stopper, “Sit Down You’re Rockin’ the Boat,” featured an added thirty-two measure chant performed by the chorus before the final phrase. The attraction to the revival is likely related to Americans’ desire for nostalgia, as suggested by Kathryn Edney. This is reflective of a general distaste for modern musicals, expressed by Brooks Atkinson: “the days of consistent high endeavor on the musical stage are over and the Broadway stage has reverted to the kind of hackwork which was acceptable until *Show Boat* broke the mold.”⁹⁴ The very subtitle of Denny Flinn’s recent history, *Musical!: A Grand Tour: the Rise, Glory, and Fall of an American Institution*, suggests that he shares this sentiment.⁹⁵

⁹² Various, *Urinetown: Original Off-Broadway Cast Recording [2001]*, CD, RCA Victor.

⁹³ Stempel, *Showtime*, 647.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 655.

⁹⁵ Flinn, *Musical!*.

The Schizophrenic State of Modern Musical Theater

Wicked, Disney musicals, and similar shows have dominated the Broadway box office for the past twenty years and have collected large grosses.⁹⁶ Conversely, all but three of the shows by “sons of Sondheim” have enjoyed runs of less than four months and have not turned a profit.⁹⁷ The high costs of live theater make the survival of innovative musicals extremely difficult. The result is a substantial dichotomy in the types of shows that are competing for audience approval.

The modern ‘concept musical’ continues to make a regular appearance on Broadway, despite the fact that these shows are not popular with mass audiences. They very rarely make any profit, appealing only to a small crowd of musical theater aficionados. Often showcased at the prestigious Tony’s, these shows are awarded for the very elements that seem to turn away modern audiences by offering controversial, sometimes unsettling narrative material, experimentation with dance, setting and casting, and using classically-based (music that reflects modern rather than popular styles) scores. The creative team is thus forced to make a decision. The safer route of writing a traditional musical with large dance numbers and a gripping plot that always resolves is certainly the good fiscal choice. But this often requires a compromise in integrity, when a writer abandons his or her innovative story line for a show that requires less risk and will likely produce great monetary reward. On Broadway today, lucrative musicals are easy to find. Many of the lesser-known shows offer a challenging perspective on life and

⁹⁶Examples include *The Lion King*-\$1.05 Billion, *Mary Poppins*-\$294 Million, and *Newsies*-\$96 Million, www.playbillvault.com, accessed 17 May 2014.

⁹⁷ These shows include Tesori’s *Thoroughly Modern Millie* (2002), Guettel’s *The Light in the Piazza* (2004), and Tesori’s *Shrek* (2008). Stempel, *Showtime*, 677.

a glimpse of what the future of musical theater can look like if such shows can find a way to appeal to the masses.

Song Forms and Types

After the Golden Age, early musicals retained many of the musical features from that time period, including form. Stephen Sondheim dabbled in the AABA form, but only in his early years of composition, during the 1950s and 1960s at the height of Rodgers and Hammerstein's fame. Appropriately, some of his early songs are written in the standard AABA, including "Tonight," from *West Side Story*; "Comedy Tonight," from *Forum*; "Sorry-Grateful," from *Company*; and "Broadway Baby," from *Follies*.⁹⁸ Many of his songs, however, deviate drastically from the classic form, such as "Something's Coming" and "Quintet" from *West Side Story*, and "Some People" and "Roses Turn" from *Gypsy*. As he matured as a composer, Sondheim became convinced that repetition had little place in his music, for "the music is a relentless engine and keeps the lyrics going."⁹⁹ Because the AABA form was based on repetition it did not support Sondheim's philosophy of text and music relationship.

By the time he wrote *Sweeney Todd* in 1979, Sondheim was experimenting with song form.¹⁰⁰ Mrs. Lewitt's first number in *Sweeney Todd*, "The Worst Pies in London," consists of seven separate sections with no return of material. The best way to describe many songs in Sondheim's later musicals is "form-less."¹⁰¹ Audiences are less likely to

⁹⁸ Dan Cartmell, *Stephen Sondheim and the Concept Musical* (Ph.D. Diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 1983), 68.

⁹⁹ Joanne Gordon, *Art Isn't Easy: The Theater of Stephen Sondheim*, (Carbondale, IL :Da Capo Press, 1992), 13.

¹⁰⁰ Cartmell, *Concept Musical*, 70.

¹⁰¹ In art songs of the nineteenth century, songs without repetitive music were described as "through-composed." Cartmell, *Concept Musical*, 70.

leave a Sondheim show humming any tunes, because the melodies are often not repeated.¹⁰² This may be one reason why Sondheim's songs have not turned into 'hits.' Audiences tend to gravitate towards that which is familiar. Sondheim does, however, have many songs that do follow expected forms, such as "Green Finch and Linnet Bird," and "Send in the Clowns" from *Sweeney Todd* and *A Little Night Music*, respectively (both in AABA). Sondheim's mix of traditional and progressive songs makes his overall style even less predictable.

Webber's songs do conform to the classic AABA form, though it is modified slightly. He commonly adds an additional restatement of both B and A, the overall form described as AABABA. "Memory" from *Cats* is a clear example of this form, as well as "Music of the Night" from *Phantom of the Opera*, "Close Every Door" and "Any Dream will Do" from *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, and "Don't Cry for Me Argentina" from *Evita*. Webber's song forms consistently mirror those of popular music, which is why many of his songs have become pop-culture hits.

Some classic song types, as codified by Denny Flinn in Chapter II, survived beyond the Golden Age. Many of these had almost disappeared by the turn of the twenty-first century, including the overture, the nine o'clock number, the male chorus number, the list song, the show-within-the-show, the pure dance number, the barbershop quartet, and the scene change song. Despite these many changes, two have persisted since the Golden Age: the "I want" song and the eleven o'clock number.

The "I want" song survives in all book musicals, as it is essential in determining what a lead character must accomplish in the production. Disney lyricist Howard Ashman

¹⁰² Gordon, *Art Isn't Easy*, 7. An exception to this is "The Ballad of Sweeney Todd," which is reprised six times throughout the show.

said of this idea: "...Early in the evening, the leading lady usually sits down on something and sings about what she wants in life — and the audience falls in love with her, and then roots for her to get it for the rest of the night."¹⁰³ Disney musicals provide clear examples of the "I want" song, including "Part of Your World" from *The Little Mermaid* (2007), "Belle," from *Beauty and the Beast* (2002), and "I Just Can't Wait to be King," from *The Lion King* (1997). Further examples of modern uses of the form include "Somewhere That's Green," from *Little Shop of Horrors* (1982), where Audrey fantasizes about a life in the suburbs with Seymour; "The Wizard and I," where Elphaba dreams of her encounter with the Wizard in *Wicked* (2003); and "Astonishing," where Jo sings of the plans for her future in *Little Women* (2005).

Sondheim does an interesting take on the idea of the "I want" number in *Into the Woods* (1987). Without an overture, the musical begins with an opening number that introduces all of the fairytale characters in a twelve-minute narrative song. Each character discusses his or her needs and desires with the same musical motive on the lyric, "I wish:" two notes that ascend a major second. The baker and his wife want a child, Red Riding Hood wants to go to her grandmother's house, Cinderella wants to go to the ball, Jack wants a friend, Jack's mother wants riches, and the witch wants ingredients for her potion. At the conclusion of the number, the intricate plot has been established.

The eleven o'clock number also continues to appear in almost every show. One example of this song is in Sondheim's *Sunday in the Park with George* (1984), when George determines, through a visit from the late Dot, that he needs to "Move On." Another example is from *Thoroughly Modern Millie* (1967), when Millie decides to

¹⁰³ Katie Dudenas, "My Favorite Things: 'I Want' Songs," newmusicaltheatre.com/greenroom/2014/09/favorite-things-i-want-songs/ (2014), accessed 14 December 2014.

abandon her plan to marry for money and fall in love with Jimmie in “Gimme Gimme.” A more recent example is when Frank Abagnale, Jr., decides to turn himself in with the song, “I’m Alive” from *Catch Me if You Can* (2011).

The American musical theater scene has become a diverse melting pot since its mid-century Golden Age. After some turbulent times, producers have established lucrative methods of funding their shows, fostering a cycle of prosperity that gives no indication of slowing down. One goal is to attract a varied audience, and new composers have the opportunity to try new styles, as well as recycle old material. As a result, there is a broad spectrum of types of musicals that are written. Megamusicals and Disney musicals continue to impress with spectacle, feeding a culture of mass entertainment based on nostalgia using popular styles and forms. From the lineage of Sondheim’s concept musicals, “sons of Sondheim” attempt to offer a theater experience that draws upon musical complexity to build audience appeal, at times experimenting with dark and unexpected material. At any give time, there is a revival of a Golden Age musical presenting a traditional show. Jukebox musicals offer popular music scores with books of little depth, while parody musicals mostly attract theater aficionados. Jason Robert Brown has been aligned by critics as one of the “sons of Sondheim,” and discovering where his compositional style falls in this conglomeration of types is one of the goals of this research.

CHAPTER IV

JASON ROBERT BROWN: HIS LIFE AND WORKS

Like so many Broadway composers before him, Jason Robert Brown was born into a Jewish family in the New York City area. As a young boy he played by ear on his grandfather's old piano. His father recalls his early sense of drama: "His first recital, Jason didn't really practice, but when he got up to play piano he did like a Victor Borge routine - he turned the sheet music upside down; he fell off the piano seat; he did everything funny."¹ Brown studied composition at the Eastman School of Music with Joseph Schwantner, Christopher Rouse, and Samuel Adler, but was more interested in writing popular tunes than the modern classical styles espoused by these composers. He left Eastman after two years to teach at Miami's New World School of Performing Arts,² but soon moved to New York City, where he worked in piano bars in the theater district while trying to gain exposure as a composer.³

It was during one of these performances that he met Daisy Prince, daughter of director Harold Prince. She was initially drawn to his style after hearing him perform his

¹ J. Wynn Rousuck, "Jason Robert Brown: Now Appearing on Two Stages; Tony Winner Makes a Name in Musical Theater as Well as Rock Music; Theater," *The Sun*, Sep 04, 2005, 0.

² Ellis Nassour, "Jason Robert Brown Enjoys a Parade of Prince-ly Collaborators," www.playbill.com/features/article/jason-robert-brown-enjoys-a-parade-of-prince-ly-collaborators-100989 (2007), accessed 15 December 2014.

³ Hischak, "Brown, Jason Robert."

own song “The Flagmaker: 1776.”⁴ After working together on *The Petrified Prince* (1995) by John Michael LaChiusa, Daisy directed Brown’s first project, a 1995 revue titled *Songs for a New World*.

Songs for a New World displays Brown’s commitment to writing serious music. He was only twenty-five when the work premiered Off-Broadway. The show was first conceived by Brown as a revue of a collection of songs that he had written previously, most of which were designed for shows that never reached the stage. As the songs were put in place he developed an overarching theme, introduced in the opening number “A New World.” Short vignettes that prepare the context for each song precede the remaining songs. Only four actors are used throughout the show, two men and two women, who take turns playing different characters in each vignette. Although the stories change, the characters that each actor portrays follow a vague trajectory.⁵ *Songs for a New World* does not offer a specific narrative, but continually relies on the theme of people starting over and creating new beginnings, each in their own “new world.”

The songs in *Songs for a New World* are all solo or duet numbers in which the characters arrive at a moment of decision or realization. Every song is comparable to the “eleven o’clock number.” Many of these songs have become ‘hits’ among musical theater fans: frequently reproduced in cabarets, auditions and concerts. The most famous, “Stars

⁴ Nassour, “Prince-ly Collaborators.”

⁵ Scott Miller, *Rebels with Applause: Broadway's Groundbreaking Musicals* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2001).

and the Moon,” is now a showtunes standard that has been recorded by Audra McDonald, Betty Buckley, and Renée Fleming.⁶

It was through Daisy Prince that Brown met her father, Harold Prince. Brown describes this relationship: “Friends is hard with Hal...family is what you become. All of a sudden you're showing up at brunch, then they're asking you to help pick out Daisy's piano and calling you to come to the Christmas party. At that point, we'd known each other three years.”⁷ Brown's association with the Prince family accelerated his career; Harold Prince asked Brown to collaborate with him on *Parade* after Stephen Sondheim had turned down the project.

Parade opened on Broadway in 1998.⁸ It is a dramatization of the 1913 trial of Jewish factory manager Leo Frank, who was accused and convicted in Atlanta of raping and murdering a teenage employee. Despite receiving accolades for an intellectually stimulating score, Brown was criticized for using such dark material—anti-Semitism, lynching, and the Ku Klux Klan—in a musical. Therefore, the initial critical reviews were mixed.⁹ This mirrors the disapproval that Leonard Bernstein, Jerome Robbins, and Sondheim received for *West Side Story*'s sobering content in 1955.¹⁰ *Parade* did not last four months on Broadway, but did win Brown a Tony Award in 1999 for Best Original

⁶ “Jason Robert Brown: Biography,” web.archive.org/web/20140219142341/http://americantheatrewing.org/biography/detail/jason_robert_brown (2011), accessed 22 July 2014.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ “Internet Broadway Database Listing,” www.ibdb.com, accessed 24 April 2014.

⁹ Andre Bishop, “Sad Or Kinky, a Love Story is the Essence,” *New York Times* (1923-Current File), Dec 12, 1998, 2.

¹⁰ John Alan Conrad, “West Side Story,” *Grove Music Online*, ed. L. Macy. (online version; accessed 16 May 2014), www.grovemusic.com.

Musical Score and Best Book.¹¹ Ben Brantley, theater critic for *The New York Times*, praised the young composer: “Mr. Brown’s songs, while artfully shading classic hymn and march forms with dark dissonance, also keep you at an intellectual remove.”¹²

Shortly after *Parade*, Brown introduced his next musical, *The Last Five Years*, opening Off-Broadway in 2001. *The Last Five Years* documents a married couple, Jamie and Cathy, who are on the brink of divorce. Cathy tells the story sequentially, beginning with their first meeting, while Jamie tells the story in reverse, beginning with the divorce. The only time they interact directly is when they meet chronologically in the middle for their wedding day. Brown admits freely that the relationship between the two characters mirrors his own divorce from actress Theresa O’Neill, saying in an interview with *Playbill*, “on an emotional level, it’s very autobiographical.”¹³ He had originally conceived of the work as a song cycle for two singers and orchestra, but decided he wanted the character’s interaction to motivate the drama.¹⁴ He describes the show as a concept musical, explaining the metaphor in a 2011 interview,

Once I hit on the idea of the alternating chronologies, it seemed like the perfect way to tell the story...because on a metaphorical level, it said exactly what I

¹¹ Stempel, *Showtime*, 677.

¹² Roberts, *Musical Narrative*, 4.

¹³ Brown’s original version so closely mirrored his own experience that his ex-wife filed a lawsuit, claiming it was in violation of their divorce agreement. Brown made changes to Cathy’s first song to make her character less recognizable. Scott Vogel, “A Young Composer’s Wonder Years,” *The Washington Post*, 17 June 2005. Brandon Voss, “Playbill Brief Encounter with Jason Robert Brown, Now Directing His Beloved Musical, *The Last Five Years*,” online version, www.playbill.com (2013), accessed 22 May 2014.

¹⁴ Rousuck, “Now Appearing.”

wanted the show to say: these are two people who were never really in the same place at the same time.¹⁵

The Last Five Years spent only two months Off-Broadway, and never made it to Broadway. Since that time, however, it has gained recognition with two Drama Desk Awards and increased regional popularity for its rich soundtrack.¹⁶ Brown confirms that over 100 high schools performed the show in 2004, and he also conducted an Off-Broadway revival of the show in 2013.¹⁷ A feature film starring Anna Kendrick and Jamie Jordan premiered on February 14, 2015 in a limited number of theaters.

Brown followed *The Last Five Years* by contributing five songs to the musical *Urban Cowboy* in 2002, under director Lonnie Prince. Thirty other composers were hired to compile the score, including Clint Black and Charlie Daniels. The show was a financial and critical failure, and lasted for only fifty performances. An official cast album was never released.¹⁸ Brown described the show as “shit from one end to the other.”¹⁹

Brown waited five years before his next musical, *I3*, opened on Broadway on October 5, 2008. It is the story of a Jewish boy, Evan, who is about to celebrate his bar mitzvah and enter his teenage years. In the ninety-minute, one act show, Evan explores the struggle to find acceptance and valued relationships from his peers. Again, Brown drew from personal experiences to create the book and score. He states explicitly his

¹⁵ “Interview: Jason Robert Brown on The Last Five Years,” *milehighcritics.wordpress.com/2011/05/23/interview-jason-robert-brown-on-the-last-5-years/* (2011), accessed 10 May 2015.

¹⁶ The Internet Off-Broadway Database: *www.lortel.org*.

¹⁷ “Jason Robert Brown,” *Conversations With The Creators*.

¹⁸ The Internet Broadway Database: *www.ibdb.org*, accessed 21 May 2014.

¹⁹ Zachary Pincus-Roth, “Jason Robert Brown: Getting Over it,” *American Theatre* XXIV/2 (2007), 41.

impetus to write the show: “It feels like everything in the show is about the struggle that I had until I turned thirty, which is to say the difference between who you perceive yourself to be and who you actually are—and getting comfortable with whatever that is.”²⁰ The *New York Times* referred to *13* as “semiautobiographical” for Brown.²¹ Brown was drawn to the idea of writing for teens when he discovered he had a significant number of young fans, but realized that all of his prior material was too mature for them to perform well. The entire cast and pit orchestra in the Original Broadway Cast of *13* were teenagers. This production closed after 105 shows, but Brown did receive a Drama Desk Award for outstanding lyricist.²²

The score for *13* is youthful in that Brown drew upon many pop styles from 1983—when he was thirteen years old. Brown explains that his music sounds like many artists and bands from that day, such as The Knack, Journey, Talking Heads, Peter Gabriel, Paul McCartney, Rufus, and Michael Jackson. He says he filtered these styles through his usual influences (Joni Mitchell, Billy Joel, Stephen Sondheim, Leonard Bernstein, Steve Reich), admitting during the run of *13*, “it’s very busy in my brain, as you can imagine.”²³

Brown has also produced a musical adaptation of the 1992 novel and 1995 film *The Bridges of Madison County*. As he often does, Brown draws on a familiar and personal subject. The plot is based on unhappy relationships, marriage, and adultery. For *The Bridges of Madison County*, the *New York News* praised Brown for having written

²⁰ Roth, “Getting Over It,” 44.

²¹ Lorne Manly, “You’ve Got Another Chance, Broadway,” *The New York Times*, 16 January 2014.

²² www.broadwayvault.com.

²³ Joel Markowitz, “Composer Jason Robert Brown,” [dctheatrescene.com/2008/10/31/composer-jason-robert-brown/\(2008\)](http://dctheatrescene.com/2008/10/31/composer-jason-robert-brown/(2008)), accessed 10 December 2014.

“...the greatest score of the past decade.”²⁴ It opened on Broadway on February 28, 2014, but closed after only 137 performances due to poor ticket sales. Despite the fact that critics celebrated the show for an exceptional score, *Bridges* incurred a financial loss.²⁵ The news of the closing came two days following the announcement of *Bridge*’s four Tony Award nominations.

Brown’s most recent project is an adaptation of the 1992 film *Honeymoon in Vegas*, with book by Andrew Bergman. *Honeymoon* opened on Broadway on January 15, 2015, starring Tony Danza, Rob McClure, and Brynn O’Malley. For the pre-Broadway run of the show at the Paper Mill Playhouse in New Jersey, Brown received his first positive review from Ben Brantley of the *New York Times*. Brantley said of the show, “a revelation of a score...you’ll know you’re listening to the sounds of success!”²⁶ *Honeymoon in Vegas* closed on April 5, 2015, and *Variety* magazine suggests an explanation for the short run, “audience word of mouth may not have been as enthusiastic as the reviews.”²⁷

Despite Brown’s accolades of awards and positive reviews, he has yet to produce a true hit musical. He now lives in New York City with his current wife, composer Georgia Stitt, whom he met while on the national tour of *Parade*,²⁸ together; Brown and Stitt have two daughters. He continues to perform in Manhattan and occasionally with his band, the Caucasian Rhythm Kings.

²⁴ Joe Dziemianowicz, “The Bridges of Madison County: Theater Review,” *New York Daily News*, 20 February 2014.

²⁵ Patrick Healy, “*Bridges of Madison County* to Close May 18,” *The New York Times*, 1 May 2014.

²⁶ Ben Brantley, “From Ring-a-Ding Swagger to Swooning Romanticism: *Honeymoon in Vegas* opens at the Paper Mill Playhouse,” *New York Times*, 11 October 2013.

²⁷ Gordon Cox, “*Honeymoon in Vegas* to Close,” *Variety*, 31 March 2015.

²⁸ Brown met Stitt on the national tour of *Parade*. Rousuck, “Now Appearing.”

Brown writes both lyrics and music and is known for a technically demanding musical style—both for singers and the accompanist who must attempt his piano reductions. When Brown was an obscure 23-year-old composer, he admitted in an interview that Sondheim was his primary inspiration:

Had it not been for [Sondheim's shows] I would have probably joined a rock band and tried to be Billy Joel. But once I heard what could be done, what enormous musical and emotional potential could be unleashed, I knew I had to write musicals.²⁹

Since speaking those words as a young composer, Brown has since recognized that Billy Joel and Randy Newman also influenced his musical style (among others), but Brown credits the entirety of his interest in musical theater to the works of Sondheim:

To say I'm a Sondheim Worshiper is to understate the case considerably - I owe my ambition and my dreams to him. Without his example, I wouldn't even know who to become.³⁰

Brown is certainly following in Sondheim's footsteps, and this is also true in his performance at the box office. Like Sondheim, Brown's initial Broadway show openings have been neither commercial nor critical hits.³¹ Brown surmises that this is because his ideas are non-traditional. He writes from an intensely personal perspective, drawing upon his own experiences when conceptualizing a show: "What I aspire to do, and what I try the hardest to do is write stuff that's very personal in its way. I figure I can only say things the way I say them, so I'm trying to do something that is kind of anti-generic...to

²⁹ Jason Robert Brown, "Nicely Done, Schmuck," *The Sondheim Review*, Summer 2010, 25-17.

³⁰ Brown, "Nicely Done, Schmuck," 25-17.

³¹ Zachary Pincus-Roth, "Jason Robert Brown: Getting Over It," *American Theater*, February 2007, 36-44.

be able to put something of my own out there ...it's a little scary.”³² Brown frequently speaks candidly about his inspirations and motivations for each of his musicals, always expressing something that resonates deeply within him.³³

In addition to his six musicals, Brown has also written several projects that are not musical theater shows. He released a solo album, *Wearing Someone Else's Clothes*, in 2005. His *Chanukah Suite*, released in 2008, is a three-part chorale fanfare featuring traditional Hebrew songs mixed with up-tempo rock n' roll rhythms. He also composed a symphonic adaptation of *The Trumpet of the Swan* in 2011, which he describes as a “novel symphony for actors and orchestra.”³⁴

While Brown's shows struggled during the late 1990s and early 2000s, Broadway was celebrating many productions with high grosses, including *The Lion King* (1997), *The Producers* (2001), and *Wicked* (2002). Each of these has garnered gross earnings of over \$200 million.³⁵ Brown's shows did not generate such exorbitant revenues, yet he remained true to his commitment to write music both for himself and a selective audience. In a 2011 interview, Brown describes his thoughts on such shows: “*The Producers* is not interesting music. It's a huge hit; it's a blast, a lot of fun, everybody's great. But the music is as dull as dirt. And I just sit down and think, why couldn't the music have been better?”³⁶ In this case, audiences may disagree with Brown's taste; however, his philosophy is reminiscent of Sondheim's opinion on writing for audiences.

³² Michael Gioia, “Bridges Tony Nominee Jason Robert Brown Gets “Very Personal” Within Madison County,” *playbill.com* (15 May 2014), accessed 18 May 2014.

³³ “Jason Robert Brown”, in *Art Of The American Musical: Conversations With The Creators*, ed. Richard A. Davison (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 23-49.

³⁴ *jasonrobertbrown.com/projects/the-trumpet-of-the-swan/*, accessed 10 July 2014.

³⁵ Renuka Savant, “Top Ten Highest Grossing Broadway Musicals of all Time,” *www.buzzle.com* (2013), accessed 28 June 2013.

³⁶ Scott Vogel, “Wonder Years.”

“I don’t write shows to be successful,” Sondheim writes, “nobody does. Not even Andrew Lloyd Webber. I write what I would like to see onstage...the point about Andrew is that people just happen to like what he likes.”³⁷

Brown aspires to attain the stature of Sondheim, and the two composers have crossed paths. In 1993, Sondheim invited Brown, then a student, to see his new Off-Broadway show, *Hey, Love* (1993). They shared dinner afterwards and Sondheim asked young Brown’s opinion of the performance, but Brown had nothing positive to say. Sondheim was deeply offended but resilient, telling Brown, “...that’s exactly the sort of stupid thing I would have said at your age.”³⁸ Despite this rocky start, they have remained amicable. Brown is well acquainted with Sondheim through Harold Prince, longtime collaborator with Sondheim.³⁹

In 2009, both Brown and Sondheim were doubled-billed for a production by the East West Players in Orange County, California. The two-act event included Sondheim’s revue *Marry Me a Little* (a collection of Sondheim’s songs from his various shows that deal with love and marriage), as well as a performance of Brown’s *The Last Five Years*. The idea was presented by director Jules Aaron, who recognized the similarities between the two shows; both emphasize aloneness, use only two characters, and are performed in one act.⁴⁰ Both shows shared the same set and costume designers, with different casts and

³⁷ Tom Sutcliffe, “Sondheim and the Musical,” *The Musical Times* CXXVIII/1735 (September 1987), 487.

³⁸ Jason Robert Brown, “Schmuck.”

³⁹ “Jason Robert Brown”, in *Art Of The American Musical: Conversations With The Creators*, ed. Richard A. Davison (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 23-49. *International Bibliography of Theatre & Dance with Full Text*, EBSCOhost, accessed 21 July 2014.

⁴⁰ Terri Roberts, “Married, A Little: Short shows by Sondheim and Brown Form an East West Double Bill,” *The Sondheim Review*, Fall 2009, 28.

directors: *Marry Me a Little* was directed by Aaron, while Lawrence Rivera directed *The Last Five Years*. Rivera knew that audiences would be comparing the styles of the two composers, but he sees very little musical influence of Sondheim on Brown: “When Jason is compared to Sondheim, he cringes. It’s great to be acknowledged as the next Sondheim. Yet, as an artist, he wants to have his own voice.”⁴¹

At first look, the four shows considered in this research seem to indicate that Brown writes musicals in vastly different styles. Both *Parade* and *13* feature a book plot and large casts in the model of the traditional, popular musical. *Songs for a New World* and *The Last Five Years* are more experimental, featuring small casts and controversial subject matter, thereby falling into the post-Sondheim school. In addition, the choice of musical type affects Brown’s musical style in each of these shows, a topic for discussion in the following chapters.

⁴¹ Roberts, “Married, A Little,” 28.

CHAPTER V

FORM IN JASON ROBERT BROWN'S SONG TYPES

Songs For a New World, *Parade*, *The Last Five Years*, and *13* fall into two categories, which in turn influence the types of songs they contain. *Parade* and *13* are musicals that are traditionally conceived, based around concise books with plots that involve a conflict, resolution, and a large cast of lead and supporting characters. These two shows follow the tradition of the “book musical” idea initiated by Rodgers and Hammerstein in the Golden Age, where the focus is on the story. Conversely, *Songs For a New World* and *The Last Five Years* are both non-narrative in form. Each is more closely related to the concept musical, with less emphasis on describing a specific storyline and more about communicating emotions and ideas. Both of Brown’s “concept” shows have very small casts: *Songs For a New World* uses four singers while *The Last Five Years* features only two. The difference between the book musical and the concept musical is evidenced in the song types featured in each show. *Parade* and *13* present song forms and types that were common in The Golden Age. In *Songs For a New World* and *The Last Five Years*, Brown experiments with contemporary ideas regarding song types but predominantly uses the AABA form.

Song Types

Brown is well known for emotionally driven solo songs that communicate authentic characters in relatable situations. These songs are popular in cabarets and

auditions because they showcase a performer's acting ability as well as display advanced vocal technique and range. Brown's solos fall into four main types: the power ballad, the storytelling song, the simple song, and the stylized song, although a single song can fit into more than one type. He also writes a fair amount of narrative music, a unique type of song that is addressed first. The placement of the types in the show is significant to the dramatic progression.

"Narrative Music" is a specific song type that has become more popular since the close of the Golden Age. These musical numbers function as dialogue set to music or represent a lengthy string of events. Narrative music often involves multiple characters in numerous locations and situations, and therefore can utilize different musical keys, meters, and styles within a single number. This style of composition has become more popular as musicals become through-sung.¹ Narrative music is often used as the opening number, since this type of music is appropriate for introducing several characters and plots. Recent examples of opening numbers that utilize narrative music include "Prologue," from *Ragtime* (1996); "No One Mourns the Wicked," from *Wicked* (2002); and "Omigod You Guys," from *Legally Blonde* (2007).

Sondheim used this narrative technique in his musicals; in fact, he opens many with an opening "sequence" instead of an opening song. *Into the Woods* begins with lengthy vignettes set to music with the purpose of introducing each of the many characters and situations. Fittingly, it opens with The Narrator announcing, "Once upon a time!" In the ensuing twelve minutes of music, different characters are presented, each singing about the problems they will overcome in the course of the show. Sondheim's

¹ "Through-sung" refers to musicals that have no spoken dialogue, but are a string of songs or sung lyrics.

musicals *Company*, *Assassins*, and *Follies* also begin with similar numbers. He additionally uses this same technique throughout the score of *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*. Instead of writing individual songs, he writes “sequences”- shorter songs grouped together to fill a scene. For example, the “Wigmaker Sequence” contains the songs “Wigmaker,” “The Ballad of Sweeney Todd (Reprise 4),” “Wigmaker (Reprise),” and “The Letter.” Sondheim underscores many of his scenes as well, giving his shows a through-composed quality. At times, some of this underscored dialogue is spoken in rhythm, such as in the song “Waiting for the Girls Upstairs” from *Follies* (Ex. 5.1)

Moderato

YOUNG PHYLLIS:		YOUNG BUDDY:		YOUNG SALLY:		YOUNG PHYLLIS:		YOUNG BUDDY:		YOUNG SALLY:	
-------------------	--	-----------------	--	-----------------	--	-------------------	--	-----------------	--	-----------------	--

Al? No. Big? Fat. Young? Bald. Har-ry. Yeah.

Ex. 5.1. Stephen Sondheim, *Follies*, “Waiting for the Girls Upstairs,” mm. 136-139. © 1971 by Range Road Music, Inc, Jerry Lieber Music, Mike Stoller Music, Rilting Music, Inc, and Burthen Music Co.

Musicals of the twenty-first century have continued this trend by using music whenever possible to serve as a background to the dialogue and action. *Urinetown* effectively parodies this throughout the show, and the clearest example is in the “Act I Finale.” The finale includes seven minutes of music, but with the dialogue and action in

between each vignette (which are covered by music vamps), the finale runs fifteen to twenty minutes. A similar approach is used in the musical *Rent* (1996), a rock musical based on Puccini's opera, *La Boheme*. The score is not quite through-sung, but there are forty-two songs listed on the soundtrack (over twice the typical amount in a Golden Age show) that are linked together creating constant shifts in music. The number "Tune Up #3" is not so much a song as it is a short, pitched conversation, lasting only 30 seconds.

Jason Robert Brown uses narrative music in his traditional scores. "Getting Ready" from *13* is an extended, seven-minute number that is really a series of musical sections rather than a single "song." It presents each group of teenagers as they are preparing for a big date night. Another example is the entire trial scene from *Parade*, which is comprised of the songs: "Trial Part I: People of Atlanta," "Trial Part II: Dorsey's Statement," continuing up to "Trial Part IX: Summation and Cakewalk." Each song section segues effortlessly to the next, but some of the numbers can function as stand-alone songs.

Despite Brown's use of narrative music within his traditional shows, the quantity of narrative songs does not compare to that of Sondheim's. Only *Parade* and *13* use narrative music at all; both *Songs For a New World* and *The Last Five Years* use only traditionally conceived songs, since the absence of a storyline progression in these two concept musicals makes the use of narrative music inappropriate.

Apart from narrative music, Jason Robert Brown favors traditional forms in his songs. He predominantly writes in the Tin Pan Alley form of AABA, or some modified version. Occasionally, he writes in a strophic form, primarily related to vocal music, characterized by a single verse of music that is repeated to different verses of text. The

remainder of this chapter is divided into two major sections: analysis of Brown's solo songs and analysis of his duet songs.²

Brown's Solo Song Types

The Power Ballad

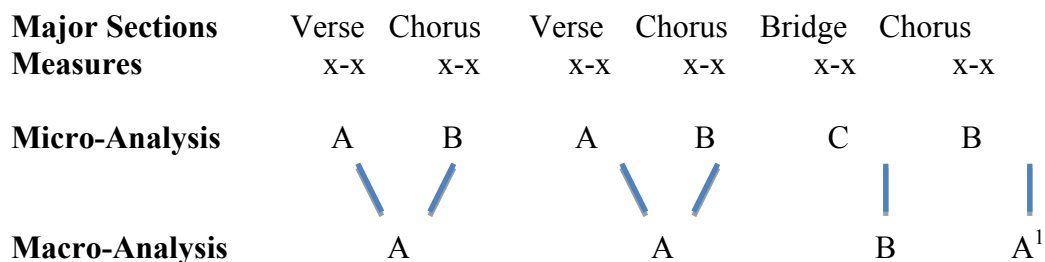
One of the song types Brown frequently uses is the power ballad, which he uses in all four shows. The term "power ballad" was coined by British musicologist Simon Frith and refers to highly emotive songs with a slow tempo that build to a strong and powerful chorus.³ This song type contains two main sections—a verse (A) and a chorus (B)—plus a bridge (C). Both the verse and the chorus are rhythmically driven with a busy ostinato, creating forward motion. A highly energized statement of the chorus follows the bridge, making the overall form ABABCB. To signify the changes between sections, Brown alters the texture, meter, and/or key of the music.

This power ballad form of ABABCB is closely related to the classic thirty-two bar song. With a macro-analytical approach, this does describe the classic AABA form in an extended view.⁴ This is accomplished by labeling the A section as a full verse and chorus. Thus, in this form, AABA would be described as shown in Example 5.2.

² "Solo" and "duet" headings refer only to the number of performers. Any of the mentioned song types and forms can exist as either a solo or a duet.

³ Simon Frith, "Pop Music" in S. Frith, W. Straw and J. Street, *The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2001, pp. 100-1.

⁴ From this point forward, the macro analysis of AABA will be denoted in bold font, to clearly distinguish from the micro-analysis, which will remain in regular font.



Ex. 5.2. AABA in an extended view.

For ease of communicating the various sections, the micro-analysis of ABABCB is utilized, and “verse” refers to A, “chorus” refers to B, and “bridge” refers to C. This extended AABA form diagram characterizes Brown’s power ballad, and like most power ballads, he use personally introspective lyrics despite the driving energy of the music. The emotive, reflective quality of this song type is why it is utilized primarily in the non-traditional musicals *Songs For A New World* and *The Last Five Years*.

Brown occasionally prepares the power ballad with a contemplative introduction. Often in an expressive, rubato style, this introduction leaves many performance choices to the actor’s or director’s discretion. An example is “I’m Not Afraid of Anything” from *Songs for a New World*. In the song, the nameless singer describes Jennie, who is afraid of water; Katie, who is afraid of darkness; Daddy, who is afraid of babies; and Momma, who is afraid of crying. It is unclear whether or not Jennie and Katie are the singer’s children, siblings, or friends.⁵ The singer boldly declares in the chorus that she is not afraid of anything, unlike the others in her life. The introduction is rubato, and the A section enters in measure 27 (Ex. 5.3). This section features a driving rock rhythm.

⁵Nothing in the text or book indicates as such, but the relationship of the characters can be portrayed through director decisions and the onstage choices of the actor.

With a harder beat

The musical score is written for voice and piano. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 4/4. The score is divided into two systems. The first system shows the vocal line with the word "fraid" and the piano accompaniment. The second system shows the vocal line with the lyrics "Dad-dy's a - fraid of ba - bies — I mean, he got — thru me, — but now he's a - fraid ba" and the piano accompaniment. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like "mp".

Ex. 5.3. Jason Robert Brown, *Songs for a New World*, “I’m Not Afraid of Anything,” mm. 27-30. © 1996 Jason Robert Brown.

The accompaniment changes in measure 53, marking the beginning of the **B** section, increasing the energy with a steady sixteenth-note pulse (Ex. 5.4). The **B** section builds momentum toward the final **A**, and the overall form of this song is ABABACB, or AABA. After **A** concludes, there is a brief coda, which is free and in rubato style, in the same manner as the opening. Ending with a contemplative section is typical of Brown’s power ballads.

Intense and tight

A 2/E

A/D

call - ing of ___ ad - ven - ture and I hear the ring - ing in ___ my ear. The lights are glar

Ex. 5.4. Jason Robert Brown, *Songs for a New World*, “I’m Not Afraid of Anything,” mm. 53-54. © 1996 Jason Robert Brown.

A second example of a power ballad is “Shiksa Goddess” from *The Last Five Years*. Jamie sings in this song about his wife on their first meeting.⁶ The verse is marked with a “Latin feel,” and the accompaniment is unrelenting (Ex. 5.5). The chorus begins with an abrupt shift in style, marked with a “Rock ‘n’ Roll feel” (Ex. 5.6). This song also uses an extended AABA form, without an added introduction or coda.

⁶ This song was originally titled “I Could Be in Love with Someone Like You,” but was changed when Brown’s first wife, Theresa O’Neill, filed a lawsuit claiming that the song was clearly written with her in mind. “Shiksa” is a derogatory term referring to a woman outside of the Jewish faith who marries a Jewish man. Brown denied that he ever tried to replicate O’Neill as Cathy. “Shiksa,” Merriam-Webster.com, accessed 11 June 2014. www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/shiksa; Robert Simonson, “Brown’s Last Five Years Removed from Lincoln Center Theater Schedule,” 25 October 2001, online: <http://www.playbill.com/news/article/62905-Browns-Last-Five-Years-Removed-From-Lincoln-Center-Theater-Schedule>, accessed 11 June 2014.

Latin Rock

Ex. 5.5. Jason Robert Brown, *The Last Five Years*, “Shiksa Goddess,” mm. 5-8. © 2002 by Jason Robert Brown.

Rock 'n' Roll feel

Ex. 5.6. Jason Robert Brown, *The Last Five Years*, “Shiksa Goddess,” mm. 28-34. © 2002 by Jason Robert Brown.

The final example of a power ballad is “King of the World” from *Songs For a New World*. A man is in prison for an undisclosed crime, yet this upbeat song speaks of the arrogant confidence and hope he finds within himself despite his situation. The song is written in a funk style with intense drive, as he recalls his successful life prior to his imprisonment, beginning the first verse with the lyrics, “Once upon a time.” Particularly in this show, many of Brown’s power ballads tell a specific story, indicative of a second type of song, called a “Storytelling Song.” “King of the World” falls into two song types: a power ballad and a storytelling song.

“King of the World” is written in the extended AABA form that Brown prefers, with the primary contrast between the verse and the chorus found in the style of the vocal line. Due to the storytelling nature of the verse, the vocal line is characterized by fast rhythms comprised of sixteenth and eighth notes, similar to the patter songs associated with Gilbert and Sullivan (Ex. 5.7).

Moderate
MAN 1:

Once up-on a time. I had tides to con-trol I had moons to spin and stars

8vb

Ex. 5.7. Jason Robert Brown, *Songs For a New World*, “King of the World,” mm. 9-11.
© 1996 by Jason Robert Brown.

When the singer reaches the chorus, the rhythm of the vocal line changes, creating a melody that is more lyrical. Half notes and quarter notes replace the eighth notes and sixteenth notes of the verse, creating a soaring effect that suggests his dream of being free (Ex. 5.8).

Medium Funk Feel, Intense

C Dm7 F2

_____ king of the world, _____ chief of the sea, _____ high in the wind.

mf

8^{vb}

Ex. 5.8. Jason Robert Brown, *Songs For a New World*, “King of the World,” mm. 33-35.
© 1996 by Jason Robert Brown.

The accompaniment maintains the funk rhythms throughout the verse and the chorus. It is common for Brown to structure his storytelling songs in this manner: the verses model a pattersong, while the choruses open up into long melodies in a lyrical style. It is also common for him to move into a “half-time” feel when arriving at the chorus, which is explored in Chapter VI.

Sondheim uses this style shift between verse and chorus within his songs as well. This is clearly demonstrated in his song “Getting Married Today” from *Company*. The darting lyrics are clever and narrative, set to steady eighth notes and written in a vocal range that sounds more like a conversation than a song (Ex. 5.9).

Presto (♩ = 132)

AMY:

Par - don me, is ev - 'ry - bod - y there? Be - cause if ev - 'ry - bod - y's

there, I want to thank you all for com - ing to the wed - ding. I'd ap

Ex. 5.9. Stephen Sondheim, *Company*, “Getting Married Today,” mm. 32-35. © 1970 by Range Road Music, Inc., and Rilting Music, Inc.

The chorus breaks, however, into an over-the-top operatic love song that is performed in the style of a lyric soprano (Ex. 5.10).

Largo

JENNY:

Bless this day, trag - e - dy - of life,

Bless this day, trag - e - dy - of life,

Ex. 5.10. Stephen Sondheim, *Company*, “Getting Married Today,” mm. 52-54. © 1970 by Range Road Music, Inc., and Rilting Music, Inc.

Brown's power ballads combine a variety of textures and styles within a single song to enhance the dramatic function of the song. The changing of these elements supports the range of emotive ideas that are desired from the character singing. A traditional book plot is not always necessary to explain the context of the power ballad, and the emotional impact has potential to be much greater. The depth of character in Brown's power ballads is one of the reasons they work so well as stand-alone songs.

The Simple Song

In the simple song, musical elements are understated in every respect. Gentle melody lines with minimal accompaniment characterize this song. The simple song remains in one key throughout, and does not contain many unexpected harmonies, any changing meters, asymmetrical meters, or experimentation with rhythmic complexities or hemiola. The formal structure is traditional, such as AABA or strophic. The simple song creates intensity by offering an undistracted presentation of Brown's lyrics; its contemplative nature pauses the plot for a moment of character reflection or resolve. The emotive energy of the simple song is heightened when strategically placed within the dramatic narrative. All of Brown's duets are simple songs and are discussed at the end of this chapter.

The first example of a solo simple song is "Stars and the Moon," from *Songs For a New World*. This song is strophic in form, and is also an example of his storytelling genre. Through three verses, a woman describes past marriage proposals from two adventurous men, but in the end she settles for a man with money. She gives enough of the story to provide the setting, but the song is more about the changing of her desires, presenting the cliché moral: "be careful what you wish for." The non-traditional key of D

Mixolydian is used, and the song contains no unexpected chromatic chords. The accompaniment is a gentle ostinato and the instrumentation is reserved; only piano with subtle percussion is used in the cast recording (Ex. 5.11).

Moderato

I met a man with-out a dol - lar to his name, — who — had no

Ex. 5.11. Jason Robert Brown, *Songs for a New World*, “Stars and the Moon,” mm. 9-12.
© 1996 by Jason Robert Brown.

The next example of a simple song is drawn from *Parade*, during the courtroom scene at the end of the first act. Leo sings “It’s Hard to Speak My Heart” as a last plea to the jury and the judge that he is not guilty. Only fifty-three bars long, the form is AABA with a phrase structure of 16-16-8-10. The song repeatedly uses the opening motive (Ex. 5.12), and the accompaniment is simple and provides no distraction. Though Leo is the main character, this is his only solo song in *Parade* (barring the three lines of Hebrew prayer he sings before he is executed). Brown does not see Leo as a character that would sing, describing him as “...a very buttoned-up, closed person.”⁷

⁷ Bossler, “Jason Robert Brown Interview.”

With a sense of stillness ($\text{♩} = 69$)

p

It's hard to speak my heart. I'm not a man who

p

Ex. 5.12. Jason Robert Brown, *Parade*, “It’s Hard to Speak My Heart,” mm. 1-4. © 1999 by Jason Robert Brown.

What makes both “Stars and the Moon” and “It’s Hard to Speak My Heart” so powerful is their placement within the dramatic narrative. In *Songs for a New World*, “Stars and the Moon” is placed between two loud, driving solo songs with highly extroverted and passionate emotions: “I Am Not Afraid of Anything” and “She Cries.” The simplicity of the song presents the singer as defeated, lacking in hope or promise over her situation. In *Parade*, Leo sings “It’s Hard to Speak My Heart” following six other testimonies describing him as a twisted murderer. Here, the simple song aids in depicting Leo as a humble, austere man, gaining the support of the audience. The song is pivotal in defining Leo as “the good guy” in the production, even though there is extensive evidence presented otherwise.

Stephen Sondheim also uses the simple song in his musicals. Like Brown’s, his music is known for being rhythmically and vocally challenging, but when Sondheim wants to allow the singer to express the deepest of emotions, he tends to revert to simple styles. Sondheim also uses the simple song at specific, dramatic moments. This is usually the moment that occurs near the end of the second act, when one of the lead characters

sings a song that identifies a moment of decision or realization, identified throughout this research as the eleven o'clock number.⁸ Brown's simple songs, conversely, are not technically eleven o'clock numbers; they occur at various times throughout each musical.

For example, in *A Little Night Music*, one eleven o'clock number is "Send in the Clowns," sung by actress Desirée Armfeldt.⁹ Fredrik, the man Desirée has loved for much of her life, has just rejected her, and she finally recognizes that she has missed her only chance at settling down. This song is contemplative and pensive, featuring a melody that is simple and accessible, neither stretching technique nor range, without any build to a climax. As mentioned before, the song is in traditional AABA form, but in twenty-eight bars instead of thirty-two. The key remains in G^b major throughout without any discernable deviation, and the smooth, steady accompaniment is in compound meter.¹⁰ The time signature does change, but any irregularity of downbeat is masked by the way the music masterfully serves the text. In a successful performance, the lyrics are so emotive and personal that the seventeen-beat phrases feel completely natural. Sondheim explains why the lyrics were the impetus for the length of phrases:

"Send in the Clowns" was never meant to be a soaring ballad; it's a song of regret. And it's a song of a lady who is too upset and too angry to speak. She is furious, but she doesn't want to make a scene... so it's a song of regret and anger, and therefore fits in with short-breathed phrases.¹¹

Sondheim's commitment to communicating lyrics comes from the influence of one of his mentors, Leonard Bernstein. The two worked together on the libretto for *West Side Story*

⁸ Flinn, *Musical!*, 417.

⁹ "The Miller's Son" is debatably a second eleven o'clock number in the show.

¹⁰ Sondheim chose lilting compound meters to give the entire production a feeling of dancing a waltz.

¹¹ "An Interview with Stephen Sondheim," Live from Lincoln Center, online version, www.youtube.com/watch?v=iWC5qfVnsVs&feature=related, accessed 20 June 2014.

at the very beginning of Sondheim's career. Sondheim agrees that in such a short song like "Send in the Clowns," a meter change feels unnecessary. In a video from Lincoln Center, Sondheim describes the way Bernstein's advice helped him compose the lyric:

But the problem [with using the same meter throughout] is, what would you do?: Would you go, "Isn't it rich? (two, three) Are we a pair? (two, three) Me here at last on the ground (three), you in mid-air." Lenny [Bernstein] taught me to think in terms of, "Do you really need the extra beat or not"... the 9 and 12 that alternate in that song were not so much consciously arrived at as they were by the emotionality of the lyric.¹²

Sondheim's eleven o'clock number in *Into the Woods* is also a simple song. "No One is Alone" is sung in two parts: first by Cinderella to Red Riding Hood, and then by the Baker to Jack. It comes towards the end of a very dark second act after several deaths, and the two children are being comforted in the midst of their dismal circumstances. The chaos of the second act is musically represented in the frantic "Your Fault" and the dark "Last Midnight," both of which occur just before "No One is Alone." "Your Fault" is characterized by continuous tonal shifts and numerous meter changes, while "Last Midnight" utilizes a chromatic melody. The insertion of the simple song "No One is Alone" in this moment is especially comforting and hopeful. It is written in common time in the key of D^b Major, with no deviation in key or meter, and the melody is straightforward without extending the vocal range. The rhythm of the melody is repetitive and predictable, and the following composite rhythm is the only pattern for the melody in both verse and chorus:

\ rrry qq\

Like Brown, Sondheim uses musical simplicity to make a dramatic statement through use of the simple song.

¹² "An Interview with Stephen Sondheim."

The Storytelling Song

A fourth type of song that Jason Robert Brown employs is the storytelling song, during which a character relates a series of events, either autobiographical or fictional. Storytelling songs are different from narrative music because they work well as stand-alone songs. They also provide their own narrative and do not require the additional context of a traditional musical.





Brown's style of composing lends itself well to the storytelling song. As was stated earlier, two of his four shows, *Parade* and *13*, are traditional in that a central plot drives them. Scenes with dialogue are used to tell the story, thus, storytelling songs are not always necessary in traditional shows. Despite this, Brown does occasionally use the storytelling song in these traditional musicals. An example of this is "That's What He Said" from *Parade*, sung by the factory janitor, Jim Conley, during Leo's trial. It fits the storytelling genre because it serves as Jim's testimony of when he saw Leo kill the girl. Another song that Brown borrows from the storytelling type in *13* is "All Hail the Brain," where Evan is actually describing to his friend Archie future events, specifically his elaborate plan to sneak them both into an R-rated movie.

Conversely, *Songs For a New World* and *The Last Five Years* are driven by ideas and introspective emotions. Thus, these two shows use a significant number of storytelling songs. In these concept musicals, storytelling songs give the necessary background for the emotion that is conveyed since this information is not provided through a plot.

This is especially true of the songs in *Songs For a New World*, where each scene involves new, supposedly unrelated characters introduced by only a short vignette.

Because the songs tell the necessary stories, *Songs For a New World* is sometimes performed as a song cycle, free of staging. A woman retelling the story of her past relationships is the basis for the song “Stars and the Moon.” The purpose of the three verses of backstory is to establish the emotion of regret at the end of the song. The pain comes as she realizes she will never have true happiness, or “the moon,” since she chose a man who offered her luxury instead of one who offered her adventure and passion, which comes as a surprise to the audience, since the opening of the song contains lyrics of joy and promise. This song is considered to be both a storytelling song and a simple song, due to its narrative storyline and simple musical elements.

An example of a fictional storytelling song is “The Schmuel Song” from *The Last Five Years*. Jamie and Cathy celebrate their first Christmas together in the scene that leads into this song. Jamie gives Cathy a watch, but he precedes the gift with a story about a poor Jewish tailor named Schmuel. The story is elaborate, whimsical, and lengthy, lasting more than seven minutes. Despite its duration, Brown again uses an extended AABA, where the verse and the chorus together create the A section. This song is even further expanded because the verse, not just the chorus, returns after the bridge, outlined in Ex. 5.13.

Major Sections	Verse	Chorus	Verse	Chorus	Bridge	Verse	Chorus	
Measures	5-23	24-35		36-58	59-64	65-114	115-136	137-147
Key:	f#m-F#	A		f#m-F#	A	many	f#m-	
	F#	A						
Micro-Analysis	A	B	A	B	C	A	B ¹	
Macro-Analysis								

Ex. 5.13. Jason Robert Brown, *The Last Five Years*, “The Schmucl Song” form analysis.

The bridge is especially long in “The Schmucl Song.” Brown utilizes various key areas that are quickly shifting, moving through C major, E^b major, D major, D^b major, and F major. In this way, the **B** section suggests a period of angst and struggle. The overall form is similar to classical three-part form: ABA, with a repeat of the initial A section (AABA). The verse includes a modulation to both the parallel key (F# Major) and the relative key (A Major within the A section). The return to the final **A** in this song is similar to a retransition into the return of the **A** section. The **B** section ends with three measures centering on D^b, a dominant prolongation, the signifier of a retransition into the **A** section. The D^b (C#) sets up the dominant for a resolution to f# minor at measure 115 (Ex. 5.14).

Freely

love a young man named Schme-el Who on-ly one day be-fore Had knocked at her kitch-en

p mp colla voce

A tempo

door.

Ex. 5.14. Jason Robert Brown, *The Last Five Years*, “The Schmueel Song,” mm. 112-118.
© 2002 by Jason Robert Brown.

The storytelling song is utilized in different ways, depending on the type of show. In the two traditional musicals, storytelling songs are supplementary—a character is recounting or predicting a chain of events to enhance the already progressing plot. In the concept musicals, storytelling songs are necessary to provide the plot, which means that a greater variety of emotions and scenarios can be communicated within a single show. These songs also work well as stand-alone songs for solo performance, adding to Brown’s reputation.

The Stylized Song

The fourth song type that Jason Robert Brown writes is the stylized song. In this type of song, Brown borrows from a specific genre of music, which then determines the musical elements such as form, harmony, text, and rhythms. His use of gospel, funk, Latin, blues, Klezmer, jazz, rock, and classic showtunes is a dominant trend in all four musicals analyzed in this research. Chapter VII explores these specific style allusions in Jason Robert Brown's musicals.

Brown's Duet Song Types

A duet by Jason Robert Brown is not common—the four shows considered in this research contain only four total duets, one per show. In these songs, Brown writes in the style of a simple song or a power ballad, writing melodic, lyrical tunes. The four duets include “I’d Give it All For You” from *Songs for a New World*, “All the Wasted Time,” from *Parade*, “Tell Her,” from *13*, and “The Next Ten Minutes” from *The Last Five Years*. All of Brown's duets are traditional songs and follow a similar form: an expanded AABA.

Despite the rarity, Brown uses duets at important dramatic moments. Unlike Sondheim, whose eleven o'clock numbers are often solo songs, Brown's love duets function as the ‘eleven o'clock number,’ occurring just after the midway point of the show. This is not surprising, considering that the subject matter of each of Brown's shows is centered on the complexity of relationships. In each case, the duet represents a joining together of two lead characters who decide that their relationship, though very difficult, is worth it. Scott Miller comments that this is the same message of Sondheim's

groundbreaking musical *Company*, and one that is not often expressed in musicals or pop songs.¹³

In *Songs for a New World*, a man and woman who have been separated for a long time reunite for the duet “I’d Give it All For You.” The performers sing of the redeeming nature of relationships, which is the theme of the show. The song’s placement halfway through the second act suggests that it comes at a dramatically poignant moment, as seven of the previous twelve songs in the show deal with bad relationships or failing marriages.¹⁴ “I’d Give it All For You” is a power ballad in an expanded AABA form, comprised of verse/chorus, verse/chorus, bridge, chorus. It remains in D major with the exception of the bridge, which modulates to C major (VII). The melody is simple and tuneful, in compound time.

In *Parade*, Leo is in jail facing life imprisonment, and Lucille brings him a picnic lunch. In “All the Wasted Time,” they regret the many cold and bitter years they have shared and begin to truly appreciate each other and their relationship. The song is a simple song type, with Brown’s minimalist ostinato serving as accompaniment (discussed in Chapter VI). Leo sings a verse and a chorus first in B^b major. Lucille repeats the same material in G major (VI), and then they sing together in B^b. The choice of a new key for Lucille could be to signify an initial sense of distance from her husband, and her commitment to return to him by modulating back to “his” key.

In the only duet in *13*, Evan is apologizing to Patrice for making fun of her in front of the whole school. “Tell Her” is written as a simple song type, using a basic

¹³ Scott Miller, *Rebels with applause: Broadway's groundbreaking musicals*, Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2001.

¹⁴ These songs include “Just One Step,” “I’m Not Afraid of Anything,” “Stars and the Moon,” “Surabaya Santa,” and vaguely “She Cries” and “The World Was Dancing.”

AABA form. It is reminiscent of the “almost love song” popularized by Rodgers and Hammerstein, as it is unclear whether the two are romantically interested or not.¹⁵ The phrase structure is neatly distributed: described as 16-16-8-8. Like all of Brown’s simple song types, this one comes as a surprise because of its placement. *13* is comprised of songs that are in funk, rock, and blues styles and are rhythmically driven with high energy. “Tell Her” provides the only introspective moment of calm and reflection with its slow tempo in common time in the tumultuous, hormone-driven show. Evan sings first in G major, and then the rest of the song is in B^b major (^bIII).

In the duet from *The Last Five Years*, Jamie and Cathy sing a love song at their wedding in “The Next Ten Minutes.” The play on words of the title of the song with the title of the show suggest the significance in the drama of this song. Jamie tells the story forwards while Cathy tells the story backwards, and this song is the only moment in the show where Jamie and Cathy are interacting together. The text becomes ironic, since the audience knows that the couple is on the brink of divorce:

Will you share your life with me
For the next ten lifetimes
For a million summers ‘til the world explodes
‘til there’s no one left
Who has ever known us apart?

Never once in the song is the word “love” used, even though both Jamie and Cathy sing about loving each other throughout their solo songs. The form of this song is simple AABA. This is Brown’s only duet where the man and woman do not sing the same material in the main sections: Jamie always sings the A material and Cathy sings the B

¹⁵ The ambiguity is cleared immediately following the song, however, as Evan offers “I’m sorry,” to which Patrice replies, “I still hate you.”

on the words “I do,” musically and textually representing their union. The ultimate fate of the marriage, however, is foreshadowed in the dissonance of the accompaniment.

Flowing (♩ = 64)

JAMIE:

(falsetto)

nev - ver change the world Un - til I

colla voce

JAMIE:

I do. I do. I do.

do. do. do.

p a tempo

mf

rit.

mp

Ex. 5.16. Jason Robert Brown, *The Last Five Years*, “The Next Ten Minutes,” mm. 71-81. © 2002 by Jason Robert Brown.

The similarities among Brown's four duets are striking. All are written simply, in traditional AABA form, with recurring motives. All four duets represent a reunion between the couple following a period of separation or angst. Even the wedding song "The Next Ten Minutes" reflects this tension; because of the backwards storytelling of the show, the audience has already seen the impending division between the couple. In all four, the man sings first, the woman second, and then they sing together at the end. Three of the four are written in compound meter with an unrelenting ostinato accompaniment ("Tell Her" is the exception—and it is also the only of the four duets where the audience isn't sure if the two are involved romantically.) Three of the four duets end with the two singers on the same note, signifying the connection of the relationship. The only one that does not is "All the Wasted Time" from *Parade*. In this song, Leo sings the final phrase alone, significant because he is dead by the end of the show.

Other musical theater composers have used musical unison between characters to signify the joining of two relationships. One of the storylines in Sondheim's *Into the Woods* is the relationship between the baker and the mysterious man. At the end of the second act, the song "No more" serves as a moment of reconciliation between the two. During this duet, the characters sing of the frustrations of their lives, never singing together until the moment they realize that they have more in common than they thought. The lyric here is, "Like father, like son." They start this line an octave apart—the baker descends two whole steps while the mysterious man ascends two whole steps. They meet on a unison note on the final "like," and split again into harmony on "son" (Ex. 5.17).

Andante

dis-ap-point in turn, I guess. For - get, though, we won't...

Like fa - ther, like son.

Like fa - ther, like son.

rubato

a tempo

Ex. 5.17. Stephen Sondheim, *Into the Woods*, “No More,” mm. 110-113. ©1987 Rilting Music, Inc.

They depart from the unison for their own final note, fitting because after this line the mysterious man disappears and is never seen again. The baker then decides not to abandon his own family and face his responsibilities, unlike his father before him.

A second example of the symbolic use of unison in recent musical theater is found in the score of *Ragtime* (Flaherty and Ahrens, 1998). *Ragtime* illustrates the struggles of different social classes and races in New York City at the turn of the 20th century. Midway through Act II, two characters meet in Atlantic City while escaping the social unrest in New York and sing “Our Children.” Mother is married and Tateh is a recent immigrant who lost his wife and there is no apparent romantic interest between them.¹⁶ In this song, they are watching their two (respective) children play together. It is not a love song, but they do wed at the end of the show, after Mother’s husband dies. Their future together is foreshadowed through the use of musical unison, even when the drama does

¹⁶ The wealthy white family in the musical has generic names: Father, Mother, Mother’s Younger Brother, and Grandfather.

not suggest a romantic connection. In measure 53, they sing a unison D on the word “future,” appropriately (Ex. 5.18).

Easy Waltz

so fast toward the fu - ture from the

MOTHER: TATEH: toward the fu - ture from the

Ex. 5.18. Stephen Flaherty and Lynn Ahrens, *Ragtime*, “Our Children,” mm. 51-54.

Sondheim uses duets more frequently than Brown. He uses the dramatic progression to dictate song structure; therefore, many of his duet or group numbers are closer to sung dialogue than traditional songs, a technique common to operatic writing, but not to the traditional duets of musical theater. In the duet “Barcelona,” from *Company*, Bobby and his girlfriend, April, trade lines every measure:

Bobby: Stay a minute.
 April: No, I can't.
 Bobby: Yes, you can.
 April: No, I can't.
 Bobby: Where you going?
 April: Barcelona!
 Bobby: So you said.
 April: And Madrid.
 Bobby: Bon voyage.
 April: On a Boeing.

Sondheim uses this technique throughout all of his shows. Examples include “A Very Nice Prince” from *Into the Woods*; “You Must Meet My Wife,” from *A Little Night Music*; “A Little Priest,” and “Kiss Me,” from *Sweeney Todd*; “We Had a Good Thing Going,” and “It’s a Hit!” from *Merrily We Roll Along*; “With So Little To Be Sure Of,” from *Anyone Can Whistle*; and “I Read,” from *Passion*. Sondheim does not use meter changes within these dialogue-based duets, as shown in this example from “You Must Meet My Wife” (Ex. 5.19).

Unlike Brown, Sondheim rarely writes duets in a typical song structure, but experiments with less-predictable forms. Since these songs are mostly through-composed and include uneven phrases that are difficult to sing, they are not commonly performed outside of the dramatic context, as are Brown’s.

Moderato, in three

zarre, but you're jok - ing. She dotes on Your dim - ple. My

snor - ing. How dear. The point is, she's real - ly sim - ple. Yes,

that much seems clear. She gives me fun - ny names: Like-?

Ex. 5.19. Stephen Sondheim, *A Little Night Music*, “You Must Meet My Wife,” mm. 119-129. © 1973 Rilting Music, Inc.

The rare Sondheim duet in a traditional form also contains the conversational sections. For example, “Agony,” from *Into the Woods* is written in traditional AABA

form with a recognizable chorus.¹⁷ Even within this structure, however, the two characters “converse” during the chorus:

Both: Agony! Oh, the torture they teach!
 Rapunzel’s Prince: What’s as intriguing-
 Cinderella’s Prince: Or half so fatiguing-
 Both: As what’s out of reach?

Another example of a traditional duet is Sondheim’s “Unworthy of Your Love,” from *Assassins* and “Too Many Mornings,” from *Follies*. Like Brown, Sondheim’s traditional duets depart from his complicated rhythmic and melodic style for simple, singable tunes.

Comparisons

Brown does not conform to the nineteen traditional song types from the Golden Age of Musical Theater, as identified by Denny Flinn and described in Chapter I.¹⁸ Because of the personal nature of his lyrics, Brown frequently writes songs that Flinn would identify as the “eleven o’clock number.” Traditionally, most musicals only have one of these numbers, but Brown uses them often to create deeper connections between the character and the audience, and not just towards the end. This is especially true in Brown’s two non-traditional musicals: *Songs For a New World* and *The Last Five Years*.

Brown and Sondheim both recognize the value of leaving audiences with memorable tunes. Even Brown’s non-traditional musicals make use of choruses that return, both within the songs as well as later in the show. In *Songs For a New World*, despite it being a collection of several independently conceived songs, Brown sometimes

¹⁷ Not the extended form.

¹⁸ These include the opening number, the “I want” song, the nine o’clock number, the male chorus number, the soliloquy, the list song, the show-within-the-show, the song and dance, the pure dance number, the barbershop quartet, the duet, the comic song, the first act finale, the unusual and clever, the flat out showstopper, the talk song, the eleven o’clock number, the scene change song, and the ballad.

connects scenes by reviving musical themes. The opening statement with the text “A new world calls across the ocean, a new world calls across the sky” is revived four times throughout the show, to solidify the theme of starting over amidst all of the various storylines (Ex. 5.20).

Freely

WOMAN 1: *mp*

mf *mp* *f*

A new world calls a - cross the o -

cean, —

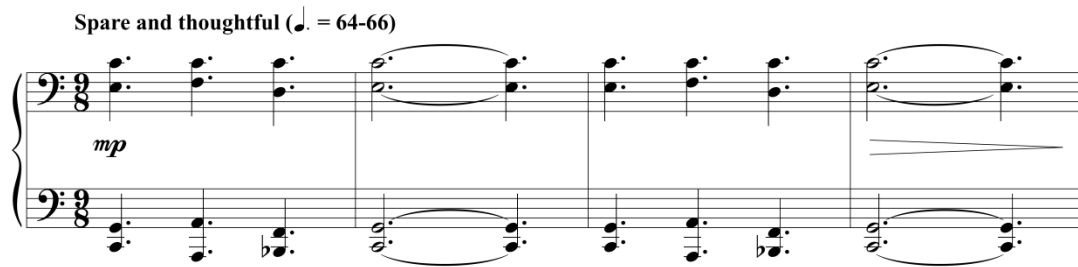
A new world

calls a - cross — the sky. A

Cm7 *E♭2* *Cm7* *A♭2* *E♭2* *D♭* *D♭/E♭* *D♭* *A*

Ex. 5.20. Jason Robert Brown, *Songs For a New World*, “The New World,” mm. 4-12. © 1996 by Jason Robert Brown.

In *The Last Five Years*, Brown uses a simple 4-chord leitmotif throughout the show. The first time it is heard it is repeated, as an introduction to the opening song, where Cathy reveals that Jamie has left her (Ex. 5.21).



Ex. 5.21. Jason Robert Brown, *The Last Five Years*, “Still Hurting,” mm. 1-4. © 2002 by Jason Robert Brown.

Since the show alternates between the forwards and backwards chronologies, there is a constant switch between the two being madly in love and the marriage falling apart. This leitmotif is used during the positive numbers to remind the audience of the opening lyrics that Cathy sings, “Jamie is over and Jamie is gone, Jamie’s decided it’s time to move on.” One example of this is Cathy’s song “A Part of That,” where she concludes the song with the decision that she is satisfied to be Jamie’s wife. However, at the end of the song (measures 119-120), the four-chord leitmotif is played. This is unexpected because it is in a different style from the rest of the song (Ex. 5.22).

♩ = 140
A tempo

of that, I'm a part of that. I'm a part

Poco Rit.

of that.

Ex. 5.22. Jason Robert Brown, *The Last Five Years*, “A Part of That,” mm.113-120. © 2002 by Jason Robert Brown.

Brown’s introspective and personal songs found mainly in *Songs For a New World* and *The Next Five Years* are reminiscent of a Sondheim song type Dan Cantrell calls “inner monologue” songs.¹⁹ Flinn describes this song type as a soliloquy. Sondheim uses them extensively in *A Little Night Music* to introduce the desires of three main characters Fredrik, Henrik, and Anne in their respective songs “Now,” “Later,” and “Soon.” *A Little Night Music* is another musical built around relationships, and by the end of the show all adult characters are in a relationship except for the maid, Petra. Although Petra is a secondary character, she is given the antepenultimate song of the show, “The

¹⁹ Dan Cantrell, *Concept Musical*, 29.

Miller's Son." This inner-monologue song expresses her satisfaction in enjoying various "meanwhiles," saying, "a girl has to celebrate what passes by."²⁰

The placement of "The Miller's Son"—late in the second act, just before the finale—makes it pivotal in understanding the meaning of the show. *A Little Night Music* is a musical about relationships, and most of the situations throughout the show reflect the joys and sorrows that accompany them. By using a solo song that celebrates singleness as the eleven o'clock number, Sondheim is making a statement about the sense of futility involved in relationships.²¹ This is contrary to Jason Robert Brown's eleven o'clock numbers, which are duets that emphasize the beauty of a love relationship in the midst of a show that is about relationship divisions.

Some generalizations can be made about the overall message of both Brown and Sondheim's shows based on their choice of eleven o'clock number. Brown, in the four musicals discussed in this research, is presenting a celebration of love relationships. Even in the failing relationship in *The Last Five Years*, the overall sentiment portrayed is this: to be in a relationship is the deepest physiological need. This is evidenced by Jamie's words in "Nobody Needs to Know," "since I need to be in love with someone, maybe I could be in love with someone like you." Further evidence of this is from *Parade*, when Lucille begs of Leo, "I can't do it alone, Leo...I want you to come home."

Sondheim's overall message in each of his shows is harder to generalize, as his themes are more subversive. Although *A Little Night Music* and *Company* feature prominent unmarried characters, a closer analysis of Sondheim's lyrics is necessary to reveal the depth of their meaning. In *Company*, each of the four couples that Bobby

²⁰ Stephen Sondheim, *A Little Night Music*. Piano/Vocal score. 1983.

²¹ This is more significant in that *A Little Night Music* has few solo numbers.

relates to appears unfulfilled. And yet, Bobby is repeatedly unhappy in his singleness, as he lists all of the qualities he is dreaming of in a woman in “Someone is Waiting.” The eleven o’clock number, “Being Alive,” reveals his true sentiment. The first verse suggests that the dysfunctional relationships he observes have driven him to prefer aloneness:

Someone to need you too much
Someone to know you too well
Someone to pull you up short
And put you through hell

However, his final verse changes the same lyrics into a plea:

Somebody, crowd me with love
Somebody, force me to care
Somebody, make me come through
I’ll always be there, as frightened as you
To help us survive, Being Alive

Here, Sondheim reveals that Bobby’s final conclusion is that a relationship is truly worth the struggle and pain. A similar sentiment is offered in *Into the Woods* with the eleven o’clock number, “No One is Alone.” This is a consistent message that Brown conveys in each of his shows.

It was mentioned earlier that each of Brown’s love duets are written in compound meter. One of Sondheim’s musicals that uses love as its central theme, *A Little Night Music*, also uses compound or triple meter throughout. Sondheim explains that this was intentional: “In *Night Music* I put everything in some form of triple time so that the whole score would feel vaguely like a long waltz with scherzi in between.”²² Joanne Gordon credits this style that Sondheim maintains throughout the score as an attempt to add to the

²² Gordon, Joanne. *Art Isn’t Easy: The Theater of Stephen Sondheim*. Da Capo Press, Carbondale, IL, 1992, 124.

overall emphasis on romance.²³ Sondheim goes on to explain that the unity of the compound meter fits everything together so that “no song would seem to have come from another texture.”²⁴

Brown’s choice of different song types aligns him with the ideas of Sondheim; however, his treatment of form is closely related to the modern megamusical, or pop musical. As explained in Chapter II, the prevalence of the AABA form in all genres of American music cannot be understated. The current mainstream musical utilizes these forms, staying consistent with popular music. Andrew Lloyd Webber writes in AABA almost exclusively in his songs, including “Memory” from *Cats*, “Music of the Night” from *Phantom of the Opera*, “Close Every Door” from *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, and “Don’t Cry for me Argentina” from *Evita*. Disney musicals also feature this form (or a modified version), including “Beauty and the Beast” from *Beauty and the Beast*, “Under the Sea” from *The Little Mermaid*, “I Just Can’t Wait To Be King” from *The Lion King*, and “King of New York” from *Newsies*. *Les Misérables* by Claude-Michel Schönberg uses AABA form in almost every solo song. Stephen Schwartz uses this form throughout *Wicked*, including “Dancing Through Life,” and “For Good.”

Brown writes in the AABA song form almost exclusively in all four of his musicals (see Appendix A), which distinguishes him from Sondheim, who wrote in multiple forms, many of which borrow from classical formal structures. In this way, Brown’s style is closely aligned with that of popular music, as well as some of the most popular current musicals, including megamusicals and those produced by Disney. This is

²³ Ibid., 126.

²⁴ Ibid., 124.

despite the difference in show types: the traditional book musical (*Parade* and *13*) and the experimental, “Sondheim-esque” musical (*Songs for A New World* and *The Last Five Years*). Brown’s treatment of song styles and forms is consistent, in some ways mimicking the commercialized pop musicals, while at times seeking the artistic complexity of Sondheim’s writing.

CHAPTER VI

ELEMENTS OF JASON ROBERT BROWN'S RHYTHMIC STYLE WITH COMPARISON TO STEPHEN SONDHEIM

Jason Robert Brown's self-proclaimed hero, Stephen Sondheim, grew up as an adopted son of the great lyricist Oscar Hammerstein, whose lyric-to-melody relationship changed the course of musical theater song-writing in musical theater's Golden Age. Hammerstein once said, "The art of this thing is to get in and out of the numbers so smoothly that the audience isn't aware that you are jumping from dialogue to singing. The art, you understand, is not to jump but to ooze."¹ Sondheim began his own career as a lyricist to the great Leonard Bernstein and eventually became known for his clever lyric style. Sondheim took this concept even farther by adding lyric-driven rhythmic lines in his musicals, such as the witch's diatribe from "Prologue" from *Into the Woods* (Ex. 6.1). Sondheim has a passion for striking a balance between fast paced, dialogue-driven lyrics and slower, soaring melodies. He described the manner in which he accomplishes this in a 2008 interview, "How do you keep things going without repeating an idea over and over again, but not going by so quickly you lose what's being said? Laying out the trail

¹ Stempel, *Showtime*, 307.

for the listener to follow, and at the same time keeping slightly ahead, [it] is a real balancing act.”²

Moderato

Root-ing through my re-ta-ba-ga, raid-ing my a-ru-gu-la And rip-ping up the ram-pi-on (My cham-pi-on! My fa-vor-ite!) I

should have laid a spell on him right there, Could have turned him in-to stone or a dog or a chair or a

Rubato

mf

dim.

(Trances) (Abruptly) *a tempo*

sn... But I let him have the ram pi - on I'd lots to spare. In re -

sub mp

turn, how - ev - er, I said, "Fair is fair: you can let me have the ba - by that your wife will bear.

Ex. 6.1. Stephen Sondheim, *Into the Woods*, “Prologue,” mm. 30-37. © 1987 Rilting Music, Inc.

² Carnelia, Craig. "In Conversation with Stephen Sondheim." *The Sondheim Review*, Fall, 2008, 15. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/2312362?accountid=12085>, Accessed 25 June 2014.

Lyric-driven melodies are found throughout modern musical theater. Stephen Schwartz admits that the song “What is This Feeling” from *Wicked* (2003) arose out of dialogue.³ As a self-proclaimed disciple of both Hammerstein and Sondheim, Brown is equally intentional in his approach to the lyrics in his songs, and his desire to support the text governs many of his rhythmic choices. Furthermore, Brown’s commitment to the integration of the text and music prompts frequent use of changing meter, asymmetrical meters, polymeter, and hemiola. This creates challenges to performers who study his music, which has a reputation of being rhythmically complex.

Brown inherited his rhythmic style from his influences, including Billy Joel, Elton John, Carole King, and Stevie Wonder, musicians known for their individual pianistic styles. Brown developed his own specific style, which takes elements from each of these models, and he is adamant that they are notated correctly in his published music. He insists that his published “Vocal Selections” from each show closely mirror what might actually be played, which often leads to complaints from singers claiming that no accompanists can play the parts correctly because of their difficulty.⁴ Since Brown conducts his shows while playing the piano, his orchestrations often use the piano as the primary rhythmic and melodic voice. Brown also orchestrates all of his own shows, which is atypical; traditionally another arranger is hired.

Quarter Note Ostinato

One element of Brown’s style is his frequent use of quarter-note ostinati in his accompaniment lines. “The New World,” the opening song in his first musical, *Songs For a New World*, demonstrates this principle. After a rubato introduction, the soloist,

³ Everett and Laird, *Cambridge Companion*, 342.

⁴ Jason Robert Brown, www.jasonrobertbrown.com, accessed 21 May 2014.

generically titled “Woman 1,” belts a B^b sustained over silence. While she is still holding this note, the piano enters with a quarter-note ostinato at *fff* (Ex. 6.2).

The musical score is divided into three systems. The first system is labeled "Freely" and includes a vocal line with lyrics "Time to fly!" and a piano accompaniment. The piano part features a quarter-note ostinato in the right hand, marked *mf*. The second system continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The third system is labeled "Rock Beat (♩ = 144)" and features a piano accompaniment with a quarter-note ostinato in the right hand, marked *fff*. The vocal line is sustained over the piano accompaniment.

Ex. 6.2. Jason Robert Brown, *Songs for a New World*, “A New World,” mm. 18-24. © 1996 by Jason Robert Brown.

The opening is a soft, introspective section, but the entrance of the quarter notes changes the dynamic to triple forte. This results in a clear change in energy through the

accompaniment rhythm and the dynamics. A common register for Brown's quarter-note ostinato lies somewhere between C4 and C6.⁵ When the next singer enters, the quarter-note chord is inverted and lowered to the octave above C4 (Ex. 6.3). Brown also adds an F to the chord in measure 29, making it an E^{badd9} chord.⁶ By including the 2nd of the chord and omitting the third, this accompaniment maintains a modern sound. The voice also sings the F but resolves up to a G, sounding like retardation. The quarter notes remain the driving rhythmic force until measure 125. While the quarter note pulse is retained, Brown now ornaments it by adding eighth notes on a unison pitch. This increases the rhythmic intensity as the song enters the bridge (Ex. 6.4).

MAN 2: *mf* Eb2

It's a-bout one mo - ment, The

Ex. 6.3. Jason Robert Brown, *Songs for a New World*, “A New World,” mm. 28-30. © 1996 by Jason Robert Brown.

⁵ This notation refers to a specific pitch on the piano. The lowest C on the piano is C1, and the numbers increase every octave. C4 is known as “middle C.”

⁶ This label refers to lead sheet notation system.

♩ = 144

f B \flat Cm7

And oh, You're sud - den - ly a stran

f 8 \flat 8 \flat

Ex. 6.4. Jason Robert Brown, *Songs for a New World*, “A New World,” mm. 94-96. © 1996 by Jason Robert Brown.

Brown’s most frequent use of the quarter-note ostinato can be found in *The Last Five Years*. The first example is from Cathy’s song, “A Part of That.” The ostinato begins at the top of the song, a major triad built on E \flat 4 that moves chromatically every two beats in 6/4 time (Ex. 6.5).

Bouncy in 6 (♩ = 140-144) ♩ = $\frac{3}{8}$

E \flat B \flat m B \flat ⁺ E \flat B \flat m B \flat ⁺

mf 3

E \flat B \flat m B \flat ⁺ E \flat B \flat m B \flat ⁺

3 3

Ex. 6.5. Jason Robert Brown, *The Last Five Years*, “A Part of That,” mm. 1-4. © 2002 by Jason Robert Brown.

♩ = 132

B♭maj7 B♭6 B♭° Cm7 F7 Eb/G F7/A 8va - ~

mp Light, cocktail-style

Ex. 6.7. Jason Robert Brown, *The Last Five Years*, “A Summer in Ohio,” mm. 5-8. © 2002 by Jason Robert Brown.

The first stanza Cathy sings is accompanied only by the repeated 7th chords, which highlight the text through their simplicity (Ex. 6.8).

♩ = 132

B♭maj7 B♭6 Bbmaj7 B♭6 Ebmaj7

I could have a man-sion on a hill. I could lease a vil-la

mp

sim.

Ex. 6.8. Jason Robert Brown, *The Last Five Years*, “A Summer in Ohio,” mm. 9-11. © 2002 by Jason Robert Brown.

Another instance of quarter-note ostinato is found in “A Summer in Ohio” which depicts one of Brown’s more common uses of the gesture. As displayed in “A New World,” Brown frequently introduces the quarter notes simultaneously with a long, sustained note that dynamically pushes into a new section, often in half-time. Here, it is found in Cathy’s build in the middle of the bridge (Ex. 6.9).

♩ = 132

C sus C sus/B \flat C sus/A

some - thing right!

Ex. 6.9. Jason Robert Brown, *The Last Five Years*, “A Summer in Ohio,” mm. 90-93. © 2002 by Jason Robert Brown.

Cathy sings a song late in the show recalling the couple’s early dating life, titled, “I Can Do Better Than That.” The song lacks the quarter-note ostinato until the bridge, where Brown uses this technique as a slow but steady build over twenty-four bars.

In each of the previous examples, the quarter-note ostinato serves a unified dramatic purpose. The singer from *Songs for a New World* and Cathy from *The Last Five Years* are both expressing freedom and hope moving into the future. The buoyancy provided by the quarter notes gives the melody and the singer energy to support the positive spirit of the lyrics.

Although Brown uses a quarter-note ostinato throughout *The Last Five Years* to accompany Cathy, he rarely uses the technique to accompany the male character, Jamie. The only time that Jamie is accompanied by a quarter-note ostinato is in his song, “Nobody Needs to Know,” which is performed late in the show, after Jamie cheats on Cathy with a younger woman. The effect of the quarter notes is very different in this song: instead of being short and building momentum as they did earlier within the show, this song is a ballad throughout with a slower tempo and connected style. In the opening,

the quarter notes pulse on an open fifth, creating a hollow, empty sound (Ex. 6.10), which heightens the feeling of emotional detachment that Jamie experiences from being with another woman.



Ex. 6.10. Jason Robert Brown, *The Last Five Years*, “Nobody Needs to Know,” mm. 1-4. © 2002 by Jason Robert Brown.

Paired with a rhythmic bass line in a syncopated style later in the song, the quarter notes continue, but with greater forward motion aided by the bass line (Ex. 6.11).

♩ = 100
A tempo

The musical notation for Ex. 6.11 is in 3/4 time, marked 'A tempo' with a tempo of 100. The melody includes the lyrics: "Hold on, clip these wings". The bass line is a syncopated rhythmic pattern. Chord symbols are provided above the melody: E maj7, E6, A♭sus/E♭, and A♭/E♭.

Ex. 6.11. Jason Robert Brown, *The Last Five Years*, “Nobody Needs to Know,” mm. 81-84. © 2002 by Jason Robert Brown.

In *The Last Five Years*, “Nobody Needs to Know” is Jamie’s final solo song. This is the only time that Brown gives him the accompaniment that had previously been

reserved for Cathy. It is also the only song by either Jamie or Cathy that suggests a sense of hopelessness in their relationship. All of the previous songs, even those where one of the two are complaining, express the ultimate longing the couple has for each other. However, in this song Jamie turns away from the marriage, eventually leading to their divorce. The quarter notes are used throughout the show to unify Cathy's narrative; therefore when they occur during this song, it's as if Jamie's thoughts continue to return to Cathy, even though he is singing "nobody needs to know."

Brown's upbeat pop score for *13* is replete with examples of his quarter-note ostinato style. An array of musical styles is represented throughout the show, which is discussed in Chapter VII. Brown employs the quarter-note ostinato accompaniment at various points within blues, funk, and gospel styles. "Getting Ready" is a lengthy, narrative number that is sung by all of the primary characters, as they get ready for a big group date at the movies. Midway through the number, teens Kendra and Lucy are discussing the upcoming event in the song "I'm a Good Girl." A quarter note accompaniment drives this humorous duet. A sparse bass line keeps the open harmonies rooted in G major, despite the chromatic shifts of the ostinato. Once again, the quarter notes are in the middle range of the piano (Ex. 6.12).

Brazenly (♩ = ♩³)

G KENDRA: G LUCY:

If he does it and I let him... You're a

G maj7 KENDRA: G7 LUCY: G6 KENDRA:

slut. Right. And if he wants to, but I stop him... You're a tease. God. And if I

Ex. 6.12. Jason Robert Brown, *I3*, “Getting Ready,” mm. 1-6. © 2006 by Semolina Farfalle Music.

Sondheim also uses the quarter note ostinato throughout *Into the Woods*. Brown’s use of the quarter note ostinato is nearly identical to the accompaniment line in “Opening: Part I” (Ex. 6.13). The ostinato is pervasive and comprised of seventh chords. The bass line is written with syncopation to create momentum, similar to Brown’s bass lines that he writes to accompany ostinato in the right hand. The octave of choice is midrange, between C4 and C5.

Brightly (♩ = 132)

Risoluto

f sfz mf

(sempre staccato)

I wish...

More than any thing... More than life...

Ex. 6.13. Stephen Sondheim, *Into the Woods*, “Opening: Part I,” mm. 1-6. © 1987 Riltig Music, Inc.

In this context, Sondheim uses the quarter notes while different elements of the intricate plot are presented. The purpose of this song is to introduce the multiple fairy tale characters and each of their needs and desires. Cinderella wants to go to the ball, the baker and his wife want a child, Jack wants to be rich, and Red Riding Hood wants to hurry off to feed her grandmother. For each character to pursue his or her wish they must venture off “into the woods”—a place that is dark, uncertain, and foreboding. The driving quarter notes support this intensity and create a sense of urgency with forward motion.

Quarter notes as an ostinato accompaniment are not specific to Brown and Sondheim. Composer Charles Strouse also uses this technique throughout the musical *Annie* (1977), most noticeably in the song “Hard Knock Life.” In this context, Strouse

uses the ostinato to create a high amount of tension in a musical number where the orphans sing with anger of their miserable situation (Ex. 6.14).

Moderato (in 4)
Vamp

ALL:

HANNIGAN: Why any kid would want to be an orphan, I'll never know It's the hard - knock life for us! It's the hard - knock

(Flute, Picc, Clars)

mf

Conductor counts 1-2-3

f

(+Timp, Bari Sax, Tuba)

mf

(closed HH)

(+Cello, Bass, Gtr 8va)

ANNIE: life for us! 'Stead - a treat - ed We got ticked! 'Stead - a kiss - es,

+ ORPHANS

ANNIE:

Ex. 6.14. Charles Strouse, *Annie*, “Hard Knock Life,” mm. 15-22. © 1977 by Edwin H. Morris & Co., A Division of MPL Communications, Inc., and Charles Strouse.

Strouse uses the same technique later in the same show, in the number “Hooverville.” In this song, a chorus of newly homeless residents of New York City is complaining about the ways in which the presidency of Herbert Hoover led to their demise (Ex. 6.15). This song mirrors the previous number, “Hard Knock Life,” in that

both the orphans and the “Hooverites” almost scream their petulant lyrics. In both examples from *Annie*, Strouse uses the quarter notes to represent anger and frustration with one’s own circumstances, a technique he does not employ anywhere else in the score. This is similar to Sondheim’s use of the same technique in the opening of *Into the Woods*. Brown, conversely, uses the quarter-note ostinato more frequently, and usually to convey a sense of anticipatory longing or hope.

Moderate
ALL:

To-day we're liv-ing in a shan-ty To-day we're scroung-ing for a meal,

SOPHIE:

To - day I'm steal - ing coal for fi - res, who knew I could steal?

(Tripts, Tbn's)

p

(Timp)

Ex. 6.15. Charles Strouse, *Annie*. “Hooverville,” mm. 2-9. © 1977 by Edwin H. Morris & Co., A Division of MPL Communications, Inc., and Charles Strouse.

Minimalist Ideas

Brown uses minimalist ideas in some of his accompaniments, such as repetitive ostinati of many kinds throughout his music as an accompanying figure, in rhythms beyond his favored quarter notes. In each of the following examples, it is the piano accompaniment that displays a minimalist influence. In “She Cries,” from *Songs for a New World*, Brown creates an intricate accompaniment line based on the following composite rhythm:

4rdg-dffg-dffg rdg\

Brown distributes this consistent rhythm in different registers between both hands. Neither the harmony nor the rhythm changes for the opening fourteen bars of the piece (Ex. 6.16). The vocal line here is typical of Brown: the purpose is to communicate the message of the text rather than to create a lyrical melody. As a result, the lyrics are emphasized without the distraction of a changing, colorful accompaniment or a soaring melody.

Moderately Fast

mf

There's a cou-ple of things I've learned on the man-y roads I've ta-ken:

Ex. 6.16. Jason Robert Brown, *Songs For A New World*, “She Cries,” mm. 1-6. © 1996 by Jason Robert Brown.

A second example of minimalist ideas in Brown’s accompaniments is found in *Parade*. The song “All the Wasted Time,” one of Brown’s few duets, is sung by convicted murderer Leo Frank and his wife, Lucille. The tempo is described as “moderate folk-pop feel, in 2,” and the repetitive accompaniment in the right hand is made up of the following composite rhythm:

^4qrrryqrrry\

This composite rhythm begins in the introduction, as shown in Example 6.17.

Moderate folk feel

B \flat

mp

The musical score is written for piano in B-flat major (two flats) and 4/4 time. It is marked 'Moderate folk feel' and 'mp' (mezzo-piano). The score consists of two systems of piano accompaniment. The first system (mm. 1-3) features a right hand with a continuous eighth-note melody and a left hand with a simple harmonic accompaniment. The second system (mm. 4-6) shows a change in texture, with the right hand moving to a lower register and the left hand becoming more static.

Ex. 6.17. Jason Robert Brown, *Parade*, “All the Wasted Time,” mm. 1-6. © 1999 by Jason Robert Brown.

The texture of the accompaniment changes only twice throughout the song, yet the composite rhythm remains the same (Ex. 6.18). The texture is simpler, as the right hand moves to a lower register, and the bass line becomes static, with less melodic motion.

Moderate folk feel

look at you _____ how could I not be in love with you? _____

What kind of fool could have tak-en you _____ for grant-ed _____ for so _____

tre corde

Ex. 6.18. Jason Robert Brown, *Parade*, “All the Wasted Time,” mm. 25-30. © 1999 by Jason Robert Brown.

The second change in texture occurs later in the song, and uses the vocal part to maintain the composite rhythm (Ex. 6.19). The final eighth note of the composite rhythm in the accompaniment is absent in measures 92 and 94. This missing eighth note is picked up by the voice in both measures, so the composite rhythm is unchanged.

Moderate folk feel

by _____ to feel _____ that I don't sat - is - fy, and I _____

_____ nev - er knew an - y - thing _____ at all _____

Chord symbols: C/E, F(add9), C2/E, G(add9), F(add9), C2/E, Dm7, Em

Ex. 6.19. Jason Robert Brown, *Parade*, “All the Wasted Time,” mm. 91-96. © 1999 by Jason Robert Brown.

This composite rhythm continues throughout the entirety of the song, except for the two instances when the male voice sings: “I never knew anything at all.” In both cases, he sings it for a second time when the rhythmic ostinato stops, therefore emphasizing this poignant lyric (Ex. 6.20).

Moderate folk feel

A \flat (add9) E \flat 2/G F m7(add11)

p *sub. p* *f*

I nev - er knew an - y - thing at all!

B \flat 2 F/A B \flat 2

Ex. 6.20. Jason Robert Brown, *Parade*, “All the Wasted Time,” mm. 116-121. © 1999 by Jason Robert Brown.

Adam Roberts proposes a dramatic meaning for the ostinato in this song. He suggests that the predominance of ostinato accompaniment writing is specific to the character of Leo: “The constant repetition characteristic of ostinati seems the perfect choice for *Parade*’s protagonist, as he consistently embraces sameness and routine and eschews change in his personal life as well as in his work.”⁷ Roberts compares the lack of variety in the rhythms to the alleged complacency in Leo’s character, and recognizes that several of Leo’s songs are accompanied by the ostinato.

⁷ Adam Roberts, *Parade*, 24.

The final example of Brown's minimalist writing is in the song "The Next Ten Minutes" from *The Last Five Years*. This is the moment in the show where Jamie and Cathy's two narratives meet chronologically, and they sing their only duet, during their wedding ceremony. Brown uses a lilting, pulsating accompaniment in 12/8 time with strict rhythmic repetition. The harmonies change rarely and only subtly within this framework (Ex. 6.21). This example most closely resembles minimalism, as the ostinato is coupled with a static harmonic motion.

Flowing (♩=64-66)

JAMIE:

Will you

share your life with me For the next then min-utes? For the next ten min-utes: We can

(Ped. throughout, change pedal on new harmonies)

Ex. 6.21. Jason Robert Brown, *The Last Five Years*, "The Next Ten Minutes," mm. 1-7.
© 2002 by Jason Robert Brown.

In this song, Brown again highlights specific lyrics through a break in the ostinato. The accompaniment varies slightly throughout the song, but the constant eighth-note pulse does not change, with only two exceptions. The first is at the conclusion of the

first verse with Jamie's lyrics, "I will never be complete until I do." At this point, all motion stops and for a single measure slow chords complement the solo on each beat, after which the ostinato accompaniment returns. This lasts only for a single measure, and then the song returns to the ostinato accompaniment (Ex. 6.22).

Flowing (♩. = 64)

JAMIE:

with you; I will ne-ver be com-plete un-til I

p *colla voce*

CATHY:

do. I am not

mp

Ex. 6.22. Jason Robert Brown, *The Last Five Years*, "The Next Ten Minutes," mm. 26-31. © 2002 by Jason Robert Brown.

The second deviation from this pattern can be found at the end of the song when both Jamie and Cathy are singing together with similar lyrics: "I will never be complete, I will never be alive, I will never change the world, until I do." A sudden halting of the

ostinato effectively emphasizes the text that includes the necessary words of the wedding ceremony: “I do.”

Whenever Brown uses an ostinato accompaniment, he does not alter the tempo through use of *rubato*. Composers, especially those writing for the stage, frequently use *rubato* as a dramatic tool. Instead, Brown uses the abrupt break in the steady pulse to make the dramatic statement. His use of shifting rhythms for text highlighting is discussed later in this chapter.

Sondheim also uses this repetitive motion throughout his accompaniments, although it is too chromatic to be described as minimalistic. “Your Fault” from *Into the Woods* is a pattersong, shared among several characters as they pass blame as to who is responsible for setting the destructive giant loose. A steady stream of sixteenth notes rarely wavers as the characters interact rapidly in a way that is more about communicating the dialogue than the drama of musical ideas (Ex. 6.23). When the vocals are not singing the sixteenths, the accompaniment carries the sixteenth note pulse.

Rapidly (To Cinderella)

No, it is - n't Wait a min - ute! She ex - changed that bean to ob
her f--! Then whose is it? You mean
tain your shoe, So the one who knows what hap - pened to the bean is you!
that old bean-- that your wife? Oh, dear-- But I nev - er knew, and so I threw-- Well,

Ex. 6.23. Stephen Sondheim, *Into the Woods*, “Your Fault,” mm. 53-61. © 1987 Rilting Music, Inc.

Meter and Text Relationship

Brown frequently uses unexpected meter and rhythms to highlight specific lyrics in his songs. Overall, the majority of Brown's songs maintain a consistent, symmetrical meter. He deviates from these predictable patterns sparingly, but when he does it is always to highlight a particular lyric or mimic a certain style, often accomplished through the use of an asymmetrical meter or a change of meter.⁸

A prime example of changing meter is found in the opening number "Thirteen" from *I3*. The song is high energy and rambunctious, full of youngsters complaining about the woes of their middle school lives. The chorus is written in a four-bar pattern of changing meter. The overall phrase is of two two-bar phrases alternating six and seven beats per measure, cleverly adding up to thirteen beats per phrase (Ex. 6.24). The irregularity of the melody is awkward, much like the characters suffering through the early teenage years. Brown's humorous pun goes unnoticed by listeners, except for those with a trained musical ear. In addition to this specific phrase length, *I3* uses thirteen actors, thirteen band members, and is comprised of thirteen songs and thirteen scenes.

⁸ This is discussed in Chapter VII.

Fast Rock

B \flat B \flat /D E \flat E \flat /F B \flat B \flat /D E \flat F

EDDIE: CASSIE:

I want a mus-tache! I want a Won-der-bra! teen! Thir - teen! Thir - teen!

C C/E F F/G C C/E F F/G

LUCY, CASSIE, PATRICE, MOLLY, RICHIE, EDDIE:

When do I get it? All of the grown-up stuff? teen! Thir - teen! Thir - teen!

Ex. 6.24. Jason Robert Brown, *13*, “Thirteen/Becoming a Man,” mm. 69-76. © 2006 by Semolina Farfalle Music.

Brown occasionally changes meter to add emphasis. At the end of “Get Me What I Need,” Archie is sustaining his final note for an impressive twenty-three beats (on the cast recording, the note is humorously interrupted with a large breath). The accompaniment continues in a bouncy shuffle. Brown inserts two measures of six triplet quarter notes to add variety to the passage (Ex. 6.25). This implied change of meter adds drama by placing unexpected punctuation at the end of the song.

Moderately Fast

C C^{sus} A^bmaj7

Need!

f

C A^bmaj7 C

EVAN: *I'll try.*
ARCHIE: *I knew you would.*

ff

fffz

Ex. 6.25. Jason Robert Brown, *I3*, “Get Me What I Need,” mm. 95-102. © 2006 by Semolina Farfalle Music.

Another example of Brown’s text-driven meter choices is found in “The Schmuel Song” from *The Last Five Years*. “The Schmuel Song” tells the story of a Jewish tailor who has a magical clock that gives him the gift of unlimited time. The song opens with both changing and asymmetrical meters as the tailor is introduced (Ex. 6.26).

Not too fast (♩ = 84)

mp

p

F#m C#7(b9)/F# F#m C#m7

Schmu-el would work 'till half - past ten at his tail - or shop in Klim-o-vich,

F#m C#7(b9)/F# Dmaj7 C#m7 F#m C#7(b9)/F#

Get up at dawn and start a - gain with the hems and pins and twist.

Ex. 6.26. Jason Robert Brown, *The Last Five Years*, “The Schmu-el Song,” mm. 1-9. © 2002 by Jason Robert Brown.

Brown’s choice of name for the tailor is significant because it references another historical musical composition that also describes a poor Jew named Schmu-el. Modest Mussorgsky’s 1874 piano suite *Pictures at an Exhibition* features a movement titled “Two Polish Jews: Rich and Poor (Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle).” The entire piano suite of *Pictures at an Exhibition* is famously known for its asymmetrical meters in the “Promenade” movements. The irregularity of the tune signifies a character who is

traveling through an art gallery with a limp. Brown is subtly referencing the famous Russian piano work through both the character name and the lopsided meter. The asymmetric meter in “The Schmucl Song” gives the character a haggard, disjointed persona, and also is reminiscent of a past era.

“A Part of That” from *The Last Five Years* is yet another example of asymmetrical meter in Brown’s writing. In this song, the asymmetry is not explicitly displayed through notated meter changes, but in a subtle displacement of the sense of downbeat. When looking at the written score, the opening of the piece is written with six beats per measure (Ex. 6.27).

Bouncy in 6 (♩ = 140-144) ♩ = ♩³ ♩

Ex. 6.27. Jason Robert Brown, *The Last Five Years*, “A Part of That,” mm. 1-4. © 2002 by Jason Robert Brown.

The solo violin line (written in the right hand of the piano in the score), contrarily, sounds as if it is written with four beats per measure. The first measure moves in groups of two, and the phrase structure is indefinite. When the solo line enters, the first beat of the third

measure is a solid downbeat. From here, the next note sounds like an anacrusis to a downbeat, which actually occurs on beat five. The next perceived downbeat of the solo line comes four bars later, on written beat two of measure four. So, instead of hearing four six-bar phrases, the introduction sounds more like six four-bar phrases.

When the vocal solo enters, Cathy sings quarter notes, but they are displaced from the quarter-note ostinato by half a beat (Ex. 6.28). At this point, the meter is difficult to perceive because the solo violin line, the vocal line, and the written notation suggest that the phrases begin at different places. This polymeter is repeated in the second verse.

♩ = 140

mp

Chord progressions: Eb, Bbm, Bb+, Eb, Bbm, Bb+

Vocal lyrics: One day we're just like "Leave It to Beaver."

Vocal lyrics: One day it's just a Ty - pi - cal life,

Ex. 6.28. Jason Robert Brown, *The Last Five Years*, "A Part of That," mm. 5-8. © 2002 by Jason Robert Brown.

The accompaniment lacks a strong downbeat, exacerbated by the fact that each measure in the vocal line begins with a rest. The overall feeling is one of instability with a lack of rhythmic cohesion. This is appropriate to the text, since Cathy is singing in each verse about her frustrations with her husband and lack of consistency in her marriage. In the chorus, however, the agitated ostinato quarter notes in asymmetrical time settle into a steady half-time (Ex. 6.29).

♩ = 140

F 9/A F 9sus/A F 9/A F 13/A A♭7

And then he'll

sub. *mp* *piu legato* *f*

Half-time feel

E♭ F m7 E♭2/G B♭m7 E♭7 E♭+

smile, His eyes light up, and deep with-in the ground, With-out a sound

mp

Ex. 6.29. Jason Robert Brown, *The Last Five Years*, “A Part of That,” mm. 20-27. © 2002 by Jason Robert Brown.

The rhythm changes from the repeated quarter notes into mostly half notes, as she sings of her renewed peace and gratitude, “and then he smiles, his eyes light up, and how can I

complain?" In the New York cast recording, the timbre of Cathy's voice (sung by Sherie Rene Scott) changes dramatically between the two sections, indicating this shift in character.

Driving Pulse To "Half-Time Feel"

The previous example demonstrates another common rhythmic device of Brown. While his high-energy songs contain consistently driving rhythmic material, he frequently uses a meter shift into the chorus of the song. The tempo does not change, but the rhythm switches to longer note durations and has the effect of moving from common time to cut time. This results in a "half-time feel," a label that Brown occasionally uses to notate his scores, which usually depicts a sense of calm, power, or freedom. The half-time sections frequently serve as a release of tension after the driving build of ostinato quarter notes, an effect achieved by an increase in both volume and texture. In a 2014 interview, Brown described his style: "There is intention in the words and the words have to lead the storytelling...there are places where the song suddenly opens, and you have to really be able to act through a musical phrase the same way you act through a line of dialogue."⁹ This song "opening" refers to the instant change to cut time, or half-time.

Brown uses this technique in "The New World," the opening song of *Songs For a New World*. The quarter-note ostinato is the driving tool for the verses, but each time the song returns to the chorus the meter changes to a "half-time feel." Although no written meter change is given, the aural effect is that of moving from common time to cut time,

⁹ Suzy Evans, "Jason Robert Brown: Composer-Lyricist, 'The Bridges of Madison County'," *Back Stage - National Edition* 55, no. 4 (23 January 2014): 11, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1510694281?accountid=12085>, accessed 25 January 2015.

accomplished by using notes with longer durations (half notes and quarter notes) instead of constant eighth notes (Ex. 6.30). The vocal line becomes more melodic, as the longer notes slow down the pace of the lyrics. The bass line changes from staccato hits into a sustained, legato groove. On the cast recording, a more legato style is employed by both the singer and accompaniment in the “half-time feel” section.

♩ = 144

E♭/B♭

A♭/B♭

And the road — will end —

WOMAN 1: *mf* E♭2 C m7

A new world calls for me — to fol—

In a new — world!

Ex. 6.30. Jason Robert Brown, *Songs For a New World*, “The New World,” mm. 58-63.
© 1996 by Jason Robert Brown.

This shift to “half-time feel” in “The New World” is a way for Brown to highlight the text. The verses that are accompanied by the driving ostinato speak of disillusion, anxiety, and confusion:

That moment you think you know where you stand
And in that one moment
The things that you're sure of slip from your hand
And you've got one second
To try to be clear, to try to stand tall
But nothing's the same
And the wind starts to blow.

The arrival of the “half-time feel” in the chorus brings a sense of hope and peace, exhibited by the lyrics:

A new world calls for me to follow
A new world waits for my reply
A new world holds me to a promise
Standing by, standing by.

The ‘opening up’ of the musical phrasing creates a sense of release, as the characters move from singing lyrics of frustration to lyrics of joy.

Brown uses the switch to half-time as a dramatic device in the opening song in *13*, “Thirteen/Becoming a Man.” After the driving chorus with thirteen-beat phrases, the bridge section begins with a sense of relaxation accomplished through the change in meter. Brown specifically indicates in the score at measure 77 that this should have a “half-time feel.” The lyrics within the bridge suggest that the preteens feel as though they are in another dimension, struggling for clarity in their confusing lives (Ex. 6.31).

Fast Rock

C C/E F F/G C C/E F F/G

How ___ will I make it? When am I old e-nough?

teen! Thir - teen!

Hard Rock, half-time feel

Gm7 Eb

ENSEMBLE:

Why is the world feel - ing sud - den - ly strang - er? Why are my friends act - ing

Ex. 6.31. Jason Robert Brown, *I3*, “Thirteen/Becoming a Man,” mm. 73-79. © 2006 by Semolina Farfalle Music.

Following this excerpt, the lyrics suggest the rising frustrations of the teenagers:

Why is the world feeling suddenly stranger
 Why are my friends acting totally weird?
 Why do I feel like my life is in danger?
 Why do I feel like my brain disappeared?

This is followed by several soloists describing specific middle school woes, as the music continues in the surreal “half-time feel:”

How will I get through a year of Spanish?
 How can I not look dumb in track?
 How can I gain twenty pounds by Friday?
 How can I make my voice not crack?

Following this, there is a sudden switch from the ethereal, “half-time feel,” as the dream is shattered on beat four by a strong rim shot (mm. 92), bringing the kids back to reality with frantic pleas of escape as the bridge continues to build:

I wanna fly wanna run wanna drive
wanna get rich wanna get drunk wanna get out
wanna get my braces off wanna get my nose pierced
wanna grow my hair long, but all I keep hearing is

The accompaniment gains momentum through both volume and the driving eighth notes in the bass voices, setting the tone for their angst that rises into a building panic (Ex. 6.32).

Fast Rock

F/A
BRETT:

G7
MALCOLM:

How can I gain twen - ty pounds by Fri - day? How can I make my voice not crack?

Bb2
ENSEMBLE:

F/A

I wan - na fly, wan - na run, wan - na drive, Wan - na get rich, wan - na get

Fm/Ab

drunk, wan - na get out! Wan - na get my brac - es off, wan - na get my nose pierced,

G7sus

Gbmaj7(9)

F

wan - na grow my hair long, but all I keep hear - ing is: "No, you're not read - y!"

ff

Ex. 6.32. Jason Robert Brown, *I3*, “Thirteen/Becoming a Man,” mm. 89-101. © 2006 by Semolina Farfalle Music.

As the preteens are whining about their “dreams,” a big crescendo launches immediately into another “half-time feel” to end the bridge similar to the way it began,

but at a higher dynamic level with added accents (Ex. 6.33). Here, the kids are quoting their parents in angry, mocking tones:

No you're not ready
no it's not time yet
no it's not right now
wait until you're older!"

Fast Rock

G 7sus Gbmaj7(b5) F

wan - na grow my hair long, but all I keep hear - ing is: "No, you're not read - y!"

G 7 Bb

"Not, it's not time yet!" "No, it's not right now!" "Wait un - til you're old - er!"

Ex. 6.33. Jason Robert Brown, *13*, "Thirteen/Becoming a Man," mm. 99-104. © 2006 by Semolina Farfalle Music.

During the bridge, Brown uses the switch from constant drive to the open "half-time feel" in order to portray the rollercoaster of emotions that preteens experience. Fittingly, the style shifts arrive with neither warning nor preparation. In the first half-time section, the kids are initially dazed, they then move to panic, then whining. Brown uses the perceived change in meter to highlight these sudden emotional switches.

Brown again employs the “half-time feel” in “I Can Do Better Than That” from *The Last Five Years*. In this song, Cathy describes her past relationships to her new boyfriend, Jamie, as they travel to meet his parents. A quarter-note ostinato accompanies the bridge, as Cathy tells Jamie all of the things that he does not have to change to be with her. The ostinato energy fuels her intensity as she enters the half-time feel in measure 110 (Ex. 6.34). At this time, the quarter-note ostinato disappears.

Moderate

B7^{sus} B7 A/B D⁹

I want you and you and noth-ing but you, Mi -

Bm11 G⁹ C7(#11)

- les and pi-les of you Fi-nal-ly I'll have some-thing worth - while to think of each

loco

Ex. 6.34. Jason Robert Brown, *The Last Five Years*, “I Can Do Better Than That,” mm. 108-115. © 2002 by Jason Robert Brown.

Throughout the song, Cathy is gossiping about her friends and their disappointing love interests. The text moves quickly, and the overall impression is that she is complaining

about love in general. The clear switch into a “half-time feel” at measure 110 signifies a change in her focus. Instead of griping about disillusioned relationships, she passionately describes her desires for Jamie:

I want you and you and nothing but you
Miles and piles of you
Finally I'll have something worthwhile to think of each morning

Since Cathy is telling her story in reverse chronological order, this story about their early years comes later in the show, following a scene from later in their marriage in which Cathy angrily refuses to accompany Jamie to one of his book reviews. Jamie accuses Cathy (over the phone) of being unsupportive of his advancing career because her own career is not progressing. Cathy's enthusiasm for Jamie in “I Can do Better Than That” is ironic, as it is clear that her enthusiasm was short-lived and unsustainable.

Hemiola

The final feature of Brown's rhythmic style is his use of hemiola between the vocal line and the accompaniment, the most common application of which is the combination of triplets spread over two beats. If the meter is compound, he inserts two notes over a triple pattern. Although only four examples are included in this chapter, Brown utilizes the technique frequently. For example, in *Songs for a New World*, every song from the published “Vocal Selections” uses hemiola in this manner, and only three songs in *Parade* and three songs in *The Last Five Years* do not use hemiola. Brown primarily uses hemiola to highlight the text for dramatic effect. This highlighting is used at the climax of the song, typically to prepare a big “money note” to show off the performer or to make a specific dramatic statement.

The first example is from “The Flagmaker, 1775,” from *Songs For a New World*, in which a woman soloist whose husband is away at war spends her days sewing flags to raise morale. The compound meter is present throughout, although at times it switches from two beats per measure to four. In this song, Brown frequently uses four even quarter notes in the vocal line over six eighth notes in the accompaniment, creating a two-against-three pattern to accentuate the text, “one more star, one more stripe, as you pray your child’s not dead.” “Dead” is the last note of a descending melodic line, and is a short, punctuated note. “Dead” is the key word in the lyric, and it is particularly stressed when it is prefaced by hemiola (Ex. 6.35).

Moderate

star, one more stripe, as you pray your child's not

dead... With the

f sharply accented

Ex. 6.35. Jason Robert Brown, *Songs For a New World*, “Flagmaker, 1772,” mm. 25-28.
© 1996 by Jason Robert Brown.

This same motive is repeated later in the song, where it is used for both dramatic tension as well as a preparation for an expressive vocal note on the lyric: “one more star, one more stripe, who’ll be waiting when we’ve won?” since the vocal line jumps up an octave to a D5 sustained for three and a half beats (Ex. 6.36).

Moderate

star, one more stripe, Who'll be wait - ing when we've

won? Grab a

ff

Ex. 6.36. Jason Robert Brown, *Songs For a New World*, “Flagmaker, 1772,” mm. 45-47. © 1996 by Jason Robert Brown.

This second statement has a fuller texture than the first, utilizing the lower octave of the piano, and includes a soaring, high note, to emphasize the hope and joy the singer has that the war will end in her favor. In the first example, the hemiola represents a sense of defeat and hopelessness; in the second, the hemiola leads to a moment of anticipatory optimism.

Brown's hemiola writing is especially noticeable when used in conjunction with his driving rhythmic ostinati. In "All the Wasted Time" from *Parade*, the accompaniment's repetitive rhythm is unrelenting, the time signature felt in two macro beats, providing a waltzing compound meter. In the chorus, conversely, the vocal duo sings even notes of one and a half beats in duration, filling each measure with four equal notes (Ex. 6.37).

The musical score is for the song "All the Wasted Time" from the musical *Parade*. It is marked "Moderate" and in 6/8 time. The tempo is indicated as "C2" (Crescendo 2). The key signature is one sharp (F#). The score consists of three systems. The first system shows the vocal melody for "All the ___ wast - ed ___ time," and "all the ___ mil - lion ___". The second system shows the vocal melody for "LEO: All the ___ wast - ed ___ time...". The piano accompaniment features a driving rhythmic ostinato in the right hand, consisting of a series of eighth notes, and a hemiola pattern in the left hand, consisting of a series of eighth notes. The piano part is marked "mf" (mezzo-forte).

Ex. 6.37. Jason Robert Brown, *Parade*, "All the Wasted Time," mm. 81-83. © 1999 by Jason Robert Brown.

In "All the Wasted Time," Lucille is visiting Leo in prison, and the two are singing of a renewed commitment to each other, as well as the ways they have made poor use of their time together. He sings to her, "what kind of fool could have taken you for granted for so long?" The use of a compound meter is appropriate for the accompaniment, as Brown uses this meter in all of his love duets as a suggestion of

romance.¹⁰ The voices, however, do not give in to the romanticism but remain in simple meter. Immediately following the song, Lucille leaves and Leo is kidnapped from prison and subsequently hung by a mob of masked men. Although the accompaniment suggests romantic hope, its disagreement with the meter of the vocal line foreshadows the impending doom of the relationship.

In *The Last Five Years*, Brown uses hemiola extensively. In the song “I Can Do Better Than That,” he incorporates a three-against-two hemiola to push to the climax of the song, during which Cathy recounts the story of a friend she knew from high school. Her conclusion at the end of the song is that she wants Jamie just the way he is and he doesn’t need to change. Cathy’s longest and highest note in the song (a jazz riff up to D5, for fifteen counts) is prepared by three quarter notes over two beats (Ex. 6.38).

The musical score for "I Can Do Better Than That" is presented in a standard musical notation format. It consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The tempo is marked "Moderate". The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#). The vocal line includes the lyrics "line, And to - tal - ly mine!". The piano accompaniment features a complex rhythmic pattern in the right hand, characterized by a three-against-two hemiola. The left hand provides a simpler harmonic support. Chords are indicated above the vocal line: G/A, D/G, D6/F#, Bm9/E, D/E, E/D, A/C#, Bm11, and Bm7/E. The piano part begins with a forte (ff) dynamic.

Ex. 6.38. Jason Robert Brown, *The Last Five Years*, “I Can Do Better Than That,” mm.124-131. © 2002 by Jason Robert Brown.

¹⁰ Brown’s use of compound meter in his duets is explored in Chapter V.

In *I3*, Brown once again uses hemiola to highlight ostinato. In “Get Me What I Need,” Archie is pleading with Evan to help him get a date. Archie sings, “I know it sounds insane, Jerry Lewis can explain” in triplet quarter notes against the straight eighth drive in the accompaniment (Ex. 6.39). The high belt tenor is a whiny, pleading, desperate final attempt to convince Evan to help his plight.

Moderately fast

Yes, I know it sounds in - sane;

Jer - ry Lew - is can ex - pain! You've got to

Ex. 6.39. Jason Robert Brown, *I3*, “Get Me What I Need,” mm. 82-87. © 2006 by Semolina Farfalle Music.

The use of hemiola is certainly not unique to Brown. In contemporary pop music, vocal lines are often composed in a florid style that disregards the written meter, and modern musical theater scores occasionally model this genre, with many composers using

hemiola to highlight vocal lines. In “For Good” from *Wicked*, Stephen Schwartz writes three against two throughout the vocal lines (Ex. 6.40).

Andante

be that we will nev - er meet a - gain — in this

life - time so — let me say be - fore we part: — So much of

Ex. 6.40. Stephen Schwartz, *Wicked*, “For Good,” mm. 25-27. © 2003 Greydog Music.

The chorus of “This is the Moment” from Frank Wildhorn’s *Jekyll and Hyde* uses many instances of quarter note triplets throughout (Ex. 6.41).

Slowly

E2 A/E E2 A/E A/B

p

This is the

F#m7/B Emaj7 F#m7/B

mo - ment, — this is the day, when I send all my doubts and de - mons on their

Emaj7 C#m2 G#m

way. Ev-'ry en - deav - our — I have made ev - er — is

Ex. 6.41. Frank Wildhorn, *Jekyll and Hyde*, “This is the Moment,” mm. 1-9. © 1997 Cherry Lane Music.

Although hemiola appears frequently in modern pop and musical theater music, Brown seems to use the device with intentional dramatic purpose, most often to highlight a specific lyric. Sondheim’s scores do not typically feature hemiola, as his music is less likely to reflect popular music influences.

Conclusions

Jason Robert Brown writes with a variety of rhythmic techniques that reflect his musical influences. Brown's use of quarter note ostinato is found in scores from both traditional music theater and Sondheim's works. When Brown employs this technique, it always represents a sense of hope and expectancy in the future, particularly in *The Last Five Years* and *13*. The quarter note ostinato can also be observed in other modern musical theater songs, including "Popular" from *Wicked* (Stephen Schwartz) and "If I Can't Love Her" from Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* (Alan Menken).

Brown's meter irregularities, both through changing and asymmetrical meters as well as a shift to a "half-time feel" are also written to accomplish specific dramatic purposes. Similar shifts to half-time can be observed in popular musical scores as well as modern musical scores, including the song "Somebody Kill Me," from *The Wedding Singer* (Matthew Sklar and Chad Beguelin) and "Belle" from Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* (Alan Menken). Meter irregularities were first popularized by Leonard Bernstein in his scores for *West Side Story* and *Candide* and Andrew Lloyd Webber continued the trend in many songs, including "And the Money Kept Rolling In" from *Evita* and "Skimbleshanks the Railway Cat" from *Cats*. Sondheim does use changing meters in his musicals, but other examples of this among modern composers are fewer. Brown resists a complete mirroring of popular rhythms by using unpredictable metric patterns, typically not heard in popular music.

Each of Brown's rhythmic techniques is intentional. Rarely does anything happen in his music that does not directly relate to the situation or text of the character. In *The Last Five Years*, he uses the ostinato quarter notes to represent Cathy, and in *Parade*, he

uses a repetitive ostinato to represent Leo. His placement of lyrics within the rhythmic framework shows that he is committed to communicating the message of the song through musical elements. Brown uses these rhythmic ideas within the context of many different styles, discussed in Chapter VII.

Brown's vocal style is closely aligned with contemporary pop music and modern musical theater, exhibited by both Cathy's riff in "A Part of That" (see Ex. 6.38) and his extensive use of hemiola, specifically the two-against-three pattern between voice and accompaniment. Sondheim, conversely, exhibits more control in his vocal lines, writing in such a way that does not encourage a free, embellished vocal style. Brown distinguishes himself from the other "sons of Sondheim" (as critics have labeled him) through his rhythmic and metrical style, which once again lies between the two major genres of the modern musical theater scene: the pop musical and the high art of Sondheim's style.

CHAPTER VII

STYLISTIC ALLUSIONS BY JASON ROBERT BROWN

Classical music is replete with examples of composers borrowing and reusing material from other styles, and composers who write in the twenty-first century have a near-limitless selection of music available. Brown states that his style is inspired by the music of Leonard Bernstein, Stephen Sondheim, Charles Ives, Joni Mitchell, Billy Joel, Jimmy Webb, and Randy Newman.¹ This chapter examines the many styles and genres from which Brown borrows his musical ideas within the four musicals considered in this research.

Parody

At times, Brown uses material that is reminiscent of other musicals to create parody. This technique displays his familiarity with musical theater repertoire of the past, though his allusions are often too subtle to be perceived by a general audience. Brown uses parody to provide intellectual humor.

In *Songs For a New World*, Brown satires a 1930s European nightclub cabaret style in the song “Surabaya Santa.” Originating in Germany, this stand-alone song style requires subtle communication of witty lyrics, which is why these songs only work in an

¹ Bossler, “Jason Robert Brown Interview.”

intimate setting where nuance of facial expression can be communicated to the audience.² The most common type of cabaret song is a “prostitute song” (*Dirnenlied*, in German), in which the singer-actress must be able to characterize her situation by describing herself from an outsider’s perspective.³ J. Bradford Robinson writes that music elements of the style include bitonal harmonies, triadic atonalities and jazz timbres, and are usually in AABA form.⁴ The music is of highest importance in a cabaret song, as Wolfgang Ruttkowski describes, “Often, bad texts have become famous because of good music, never good texts in spite of bad music.”⁵ The cabaret style was popularized in America by Kurt Weill, a composer known for blending classical and jazz music in stage works, and his ideas are often quoted in American music.⁶

One of the more popular uses of Weill’s cabaret style is found throughout Kandor and Ebb’s *Cabaret* (1966). “Don’t Tell Mama” is a prostitute song, where the character Sally Bowles explains how she needs to hide her lifestyle from her mother, who thinks she is living a wholesome life. Brown’s “Surabaya Santa” borrows several musical elements from “Don’t Tell Mama.”⁷ The title “Surabaya Santa” is drawn directly from the song “Surabaya Johnny” from Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht’s musical *Happy End* (1929). Surabaya is a coastal city in Indonesia with a naval base, and the original song tells the story of a girl who can’t stop loving her lying, cheating, sweet-talking man. In Brown’s parody, Mrs. Claus is the victimized woman who accuses her husband, Santa

² Wolfgang Ruttkowski, "Cabaret Songs.," *Popular Music and Society* 25, no. 3 (Fall, 2001): 45-71, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/208072430?accountid=12085>, accessed 2 June 2015.

³ Ruttkowski, "Cabaret Songs."

⁴ Drew and Robinson, "Weill, Kurt."

⁵ Ruttkowski, "Cabaret Songs."

⁶ Drew and Robinson, "Weill, Kurt."

⁷ Scott Miller, *Rebels with Applause*.

Claus, of similar behavior but in ridiculous contexts: “I saw you look at Blitzen long and lovingly, the way you used to look at me.” The four-measure introduction in “Surabaya Santa” is recognizably similar to the opening four bars from “Don’t Tell Mama” (Ex. 7.1, Ex. 7.2).

Weill-esque

Ex. 7.1. Jason Robert Brown, *Songs For a New World*, “Surabaya Santa,” mm. 1-4. © 1970 by Range Road Music, Inc., and Riltling Music, Inc.

Moderato

Ex. 7.2. John Kander and Fred Ebb, *Cabaret*, “Don’t Tell Mama,” mm. 1-4. © 1999 by Hal Leonard.

The texture and rhythms are similar in both examples, and both are in the key of C minor. The excerpt from *Cabaret* moves between a Cm^{+9} (I^9) chord and a G^{7b5} (V^{7b5}). Conversely, Brown wrote a Cm^{+9} (I^9) chord trading with an $\text{A}^b\text{Maj}^{7\text{add}6}$ ($^b\text{VI}^{13}$). The most noticeable difference is in the bass motion. “Surabaya Santa” uses a C-G in the first

measure followed by an E^b - A^b and repeats that pattern. “Don’t Tell Mama” repeats one measure of C-G followed by a measure of D^b to G. The shift to the D^b (^bII) in the bass line on the downbeat is a tritone substitute for the dominant.

Brown transparently describes the tempo of “Surabaya Santa” as “Weill-esque.” Later in the song, Brown uses similar material as an interlude, but this time juxtaposes it against the tune of “Jingle Bells,” played in octaves with an added dissonant major second between F and G (Ex. 7.3).

Moderate

You disgust me! *Oh, yes it's so easy to judge, isn't it? Deciding who's...*

The musical score for "Surabaya Santa" is presented in a standard musical notation format. It includes a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The tempo is marked "Moderate". The lyrics are "You disgust me!" and "Oh, yes it's so easy to judge, isn't it? Deciding who's...". The piano part features a melody in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The key signature is B-flat major (three flats) and the time signature is 4/4.

Ex. 7.3. Jason Robert Brown, *Songs For a New World*, “Surabaya Santa,” mm. 131-134.
© 1999 by Jason Robert Brown.

“Surabaya Santa” is written in the same form and character as “Don’t Tell Mama,” as both parody the cabaret style. Both songs are comprised of two verses and two choruses, without a bridge, and with a coda ending (in the form of an extended chorus) as described in Ex. 7.4.

	Verse	Chorus	Verse	Chorus	Extended Chorus
Don't Tell Mama	5-27	28-67	5-27	28-59	68-91
Surabaya Santa	5-34	35-61	65-94	95-117*	143-175

Ex. 7.4. Comparison between “Don’t Tell Mama” and “Surabaya Santa.”

The measures unaccounted for in “Surabaya Santa” (mm. 118-142) in the previous diagram are part of an underscored monologue. The corresponding missing measures in “Don’t Tell Mama” (mm. 60-68) are shorter, and provide transition material. In both songs, the chorus is prepared each time by a dramatic pause; “Don’t Tell Mama” uses a single fermata (Ex. 7.5). In “Surabaya Santa,” Brown uses three fermatas for a similar effect (Ex. 7.6).

Freely

F m7 Dm7b5 G7

cre - tion Give a work - ing fir! a chance.
Just leave well e - nough a - lone.

poco rit.

Charleston

C Ab7 G7 C Ab7 G7

Hush up, — don't tell ma - ma, Shush up, — don't tell ma - ma'

mf

Ex. 7.5. John Kander and Fred Ebb, *Cabaret*, “Don’t Tell Mama,” mm. 25-31. © 1999 by Hal Leonard.

Freely

I've been re - signed to spend my Christ-mas - es a - long, and so "Au'r -

'voir," Nick. It's grand, Nick. I don't pre-tend to un - der - stand, Nick.

Ex. 7.6. Jason Robert Brown, *Songs For a New World*, "Surabaya Santa," mm. 43-50. © 1996 by Jason Robert Brown.

Both songs begin in C minor. In the transition from the verse to the chorus, a musical change takes place in both cases. In "Don't Tell Mama," the mode abruptly switches to the parallel major in a new metric feel designated as "Charleston tempo." In "Surabaya Santa," the meter changes from duple to triple. Brown characteristically utilizes several time signatures throughout the chorus, likely to accommodate the lyrics. His choice to remain in C minor gives the entire song a more mournful affect, as opposed to the snappy chorus in "Don't Tell Mama." This is appropriate to the character of "Surabaya Santa," as Mrs. Claus builds her anger throughout the song. In "Don't Tell

Mama,” Sally Bowles is experiencing the opposite trajectory, as she is joyfully flaunting her independence by the end of the number.

Brown’s use of the cabaret style in *Songs For a New World* is meant to be a humorous satire of the genre. By acknowledging that Weill was his inspiration for the style in the tempo marking, Brown connects “Surabaya Santa” to one of the frontrunners of American musical theater. Ironically, Weill spent his early career as a pianist at a cabaret bar in Berlin, in much the same manner as Brown began his career in New York.⁸ The addition of Christmas musical ideas and subject matter to create an unhappy song is surprising, and creates ambiguity surrounding Brown’s statement on spirituality in the musical. Brown borrows language from the heritage of Weill and his own predecessors with this line in “Surabaya Santa:” “So on your way, Nick! Shalom, Nick! Don’t feel the need to hurry home, Nick.” Brown uses Hebrew as a nod to American musical theater’s Jewish lineage, as well as his own heritage.⁹ It further adds irony and contributes to the vagueness of religious ideals, as these statements would never be heard in a German nightclub in the 1930s.

⁸ David Drew and J. Bradford Robinson, "Weill, Kurt," *Grove Music Online*. Oxford Music Online, Oxford University Press, accessed June 23, 2014, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/30032>.

⁹ Weill’s opera *Der Silbersee* was premiered just after Hitler took office, and a Nazi demonstration interrupted the performance. The criticism he received for being Jewish, and for the jazz influence in his works led him to flee to America. Tim Ashley, "Weill, Kurt (Julian)," *The Oxford Companion to Music*, Oxford Music Online, Oxford University Press, accessed 12 June 2014, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t114/e7295>.

Style Allusions

Classical

Brown's training as a classical pianist and composer emerges at times in his writing. In *The Last Five Years*, Brown writes an interlude in the style of 18th century counterpoint into the opening song of the show, "I'm Still Hurting." Cathy performs this song at the final dissolution of their marriage, revealing the ending in the first scene. When Brown divorced his first wife he was in rehearsals for *Parade*, and he moved into an empty apartment with only a grand piano for furniture. He writes that he regularly went back to his apartment alone at night and played Bach inventions and fugues to focus his brain. When writing Cathy's opening song for *The Last Five Years*, he says, "I found myself replicating the gestures from those inventions and fugues into the texture of the piece. The fughetta section in the center of the song felt to me like a way to organize the chaos of Cathy's brain."¹⁰ Brown also states that he regularly struggles to perform this interlude on piano.¹¹ The order and structure in Bach's keyboard style represents Cathy's need for stability as her marriage is falling apart.

Funk

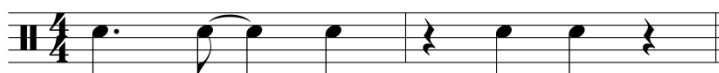
At times, Brown completely departs from his own characteristic writing to write an entire song in a borrowed style. Funk is an African-American popular music style, characterized by "syncopated interlocking rhythm patterns, a vocal style drawn from soul

¹⁰ Pat Cerasaro, "BWW Exclusive: 5 Songs By... Jason Robert Brown on *The Last Five Years*, *Songs For a New World*, *Parade*, 13 and *The Bridges of Madison County*," Broadway World Online, www.broadwayworld.com/article/BWW-Exclusive-5-SONGS-BY-Jason-Robert-Brown-on-THE-LAST-FIVE-YEARS-SONGS-FOR-A-NEW-WORLD-PARADE-13-and-THE-BRIDGES-OF-MADISON-COUNTY-20150505# accessed 10 May 2015.

¹¹ Ibid.

music, extended vamps based on a single and often complex harmony, strong emphasis on the bass line, and lyrics with frequent spiritual themes and social commentary.”¹²

Brown’s first use of the funk style is found in “King of the World” from *Songs For a New World*, where he uses New Orleans funk, which contains a *son clave* rhythm (Ex. 7.7).¹³



Ex. 7.7. The *son clave* rhythm.

Brown notates the tempo of “King of the World,” as having a “Medium Funk Feel.” The song maintains a repetitive and pulsing bass line that begins as a solo in the opening, which uses the initial statement of the *Son Clave* rhythm in double time (Ex. 7.8). The Funk style in this song contributes to an excited energy that gains momentum as the song progresses, as the inmate becomes more certain of his prowess.

¹² David Brackett, "Funk," Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online, Oxford University Press, accessed 23 June 2014, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/46626>.

¹³ Benjamin Doleac, “Strictly Second Line: Funk, Jazz, and the New Orleans Beat,” *Ethnomusicology Review*, Vol 18 (2003), online, <http://ethnomusicologyreview.ucla.edu/journal/volume/18/piece/699>, accessed 2 June 2015.

Medium Funk Feel; Intense



Ex. 7.8. Jason Robert Brown, *Songs For a New World*, “King of the World,” mm.1-4. © 1996 by Jason Robert Brown.

Brown uses a funk style for Jamie’s second song in *The Last Five Years*, “Moving Too Fast.” As in the previous example, this song also contains a relentless, syncopated bass line (Ex. 7.9), and both men are extremely confident in their situation. Jamie’s confidence is justified, as he has just secured a book deal and met the woman of his dreams; the prisoner’s is not, as he has no certainty of release.

Funky Rock, in 4

The musical score for Ex. 7.9 is written in 4/4 time. It features two staves: a vocal line and a bass line. The tempo/style is 'Funky Rock, in 4'. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#). The lyrics are: "I dreamed of writ-ing like the high and might y Now I'm the sub-ject of a bid-ding war! I met my per-son-al Aph-ro-di-te-". Chord markings 'A' and 'A7' are present above the vocal line. The bass line is syncopated and features a series of eighth and sixteenth notes. An 8vb line is indicated at the bottom of the bass staff.

Ex. 7.9. Jason Robert Brown, *The Last Five Years*, “Moving Too Fast,” mm. 64-69. © 2002 by Jason Robert Brown.

Moderate

there for me, But now, now, now, I see a brand new

ALL:
Now Now Now.

F7 Eb E F7 Bb/Eb

MOLLY:
you! I nev-er knew that you could

CHARLOTTE:
You! You! I see a brand new you! I nev-er knew that you could

Ex. 7.11. Jason Robert Brown, *I3*, “Brand New You,” mm. 23-28. © 2006 by Seminole Farfalle Music.

Moderate Tempo, in 4

BEAT BOX BOYS:

Hn K Hn Huh Hn K Hn Hn K Hn Huh Hn K Hn Hn K Hn Huh Hn K Hn

mf

GIRLS:

Na na na na na na na na na Na-ya na na na na na — na - na!

Hn K Hn Huh Hn K Hn Hn K Hn Huh Hn K Hn Hn K Hn Huh Hn K Hn

Ex. 7.12. Jason Robert Brown, *I3*, “Brand New You,” mm. 45-50. © 2006 by Seminole Farfalle Music.

Immediately following the beat box section, the girls in the chorus enter with a vocal line on the lowered third scale degree (A^b). As this bridge progresses, the harmony splits into three parts on an A^b major chord. At measure fifty-seven, the accompaniment returns with an $F7$ chord, but the A^b major chord continues. In measure fifty-nine, a major seventh is added to this chord (G). In measure sixty, that chord resolves the dissonant tones of A^b and E^b up to A^{\natural} and F , respectively, creating an F major chord in

first inversion (Ex. 7.13). This resolution occurs on the word “hey” in a release of tension. This builds into the return of the chorus through a drum fill and crescendo to *fortissimo*. During the chorus, the ensemble sings a supporting choral part in addition to the melismatic solo line, another characteristic of gospel style¹⁵ (Ex. 7.14).

Moderate tempo, in 4

Na na na na na na na na na! Na na na na na na na na na! Na Na Na! Na Na Na! Na Na

Na Na Na Na Na Na Na Na! Hey! I o-pened my

ALL: I o-pened my

Drum fill

ff

F7 E♭ F7 E♭ F7 B♭/E♭ F

CHARLOTTE & CASSIE:

Ex. 7.13. Jason Robert Brown, *I3*, “Brand New You,” mm. 57-62. © 2006 by Seminole Farfalle Music.

¹⁵ Shearon, et al, "Gospel music."

Moderate Tempo, in 4

eyes. And there's a great big world a - round. I o - pened my

eyes. Oh I o - pened my

Ex. 7.14. Jason Robert Brown, *I3*, “Brand New You,” mm. 63-66. © 2006 by Seminole Farfalle Music.

The Gospel music style is rooted in the Christian tradition, specifically the African American community, though use of the style in other contexts is not uncommon.¹⁶ “Brand New You” is the closing number of *I3*, a show about cliques and divisions among preteens, and the song speaks of finding unity between these groups and seeing each other as equals. This is the only song in *I3* in this style, and the eclecticism of musical ideas in the show mirrors the variety of races, personalities, genders, and preferences of the students.

Blues and Doo-Wop

Brown uses a strong blues feel in the song “Bad, Bad News” in *I3*. The style is appropriate for this number, in which a quartet of boys mourns after their friend, Brett, has decided to date a girl they believe is nothing but trouble. The song does not conform to any of the traditional blues forms (although many blues songs also do not); however, it

¹⁶ Shearon, et al. “Gospel music.”

does utilize a common harmonic turnaround for the chorus: $I-vi^7-ii^7-V^7$. This closely resembles a “doo-wop” progression, a type of blues made popular in the 1950s.¹⁷ Approximately 70% of all doo-wop songs share the progression $I-vi^7-IV^7-V^7$, forming a harmonic ostinato. Brown simply uses the ii^7 instead of the IV^7 , a common substitution since these two chords have three notes in common.¹⁸ The accompaniment uses an active bass line as well as a constant eighth-note pattern in compound time, both also indicative of the “doo-wop” style (Ex. 7.15). This style features four to five singers in close harmony, included at the end of “Bad, Bad News” (Ex. 7.16). The final two chords are highly characteristic of the style as well, in typical voicing. The four tenor voices build a C^b9 chord.

♩ = 80

ALL FOUR: team? That girl is bad bad news! Bad news! Very bad news. She's like a

MALCOLM, EDDIE & SIMON: bad bad news!

SIMON: bad bad news!

RICHIE: bad bad news!

8va- f

Ex. 7.15. Jason Robert Brown, *I3*, “Bad, Bad News,” mm 37-39. © 2006 by Seminole Farfalle Music.

¹⁷ Richard Scott, *Chord Progressions for Songwriters*, New York: Writers Club Press, 2003, pp. 204.

¹⁸ John Michael Runowicz, *Forever Doo Wop*, University of Massachusetts Press, Boston: MA, 2010, 51.

♩ = 80
F 7

C♭13

Bad! Bad! _____

Bad! _____ Bad!

Bad! Bad!

Bad! Bad!

B♭6 Gm7 Cm7 F13 C♭9 B♭13

News! _____ Bad news!

News! _____ Bad news!

News! _____ Bad news!

News! _____ Bad news!

ff

8^{vb}

Ex. 7.16. Jason Robert Brown, *I3*, “Bad, Bad News,” mm. 72-76. © 2006 by Seminole Farfalle Music.

Also typical of the doo-wop style is a break from the harmonic ostinato of I—vi⁷—ii⁷—V⁷ for the bridge. During the bridge, the mood of the song typically changes from its relaxed feel to something more pressing. The bridge is marked by a change in accompaniment that helps build intensity, almost always beginning on a IV chord.¹⁹ In “Bad, Bad News,” the boys begin to plot the manner in which they will punish the girl who ruined their friendship. The bridge begins in measure 50 on a held D⁷ chord, IV⁷ in the key of A major. Instead of the repeated eighth notes, short eighth-note hits on each beat followed by rests add to the feeling of urgency. The constant, pulsing eighth-note pattern in the melody line also adds to this effect (Ex. 7.17).

♩ = 80

A⁺ F[#]m/A A 7 SIMON:

We have

D 7 MALCOLM:

got to make clear that she's not wel-come here, The most hor-ri-ble way we can find. We could

mf *f*

Ex. 7.17. Jason Robert Brown, *I3*, “Bad, Bad News,” mm. 48-51. © 2006 by Seminole Farfalle Music.

¹⁹ John Runowicz, *Forever Doo Wop*, 52.

Sudden Shifts in Style

In the previous examples of stylistic allusion, Brown utilizes a blend of styles for an entire song. Brown also explores style changes for smaller sections within songs. He does this for two different affects: 1) to change the mood of the song, and 2) to evoke nostalgia.

“All Hail the Brain” from *I3* is an example of the first reason. Brown uses three distinct styles within this one song. The song begins “misterioso” with an energetic, pulsating beat, while Evan is plotting his idea for the upcoming big date (Ex. 7.18).

Misterioso, with energy

EVAN:

The musical score consists of two systems. The first system shows measures 1-4. The vocal line (treble clef) has whole rests for the first three measures, followed by a quarter rest and then the notes G4, A4, B4 for the lyrics 'I have a'. The piano accompaniment (grand staff) has a pulsating bass line in the left hand (B-flat, D-flat, F, B-flat) and chords in the right hand (B-flat major, D-flat major, F major). The second system shows measures 5-8. The vocal line has a quarter rest for the first measure, then the notes G4, A4, B4 for 'I have a', and then a whole note B4 for 'plan.'. The piano accompaniment continues with the same pulsating bass line and chords. The key signature is B-flat major (three flats). The tempo/style is 'Misterioso, with energy'. The lyrics are 'I have a plan.'

Ex. 7.18. Jason Robert Brown, *I3*, “All Hail the Brain,” mm. 1-8. © 2006 by Seminole Farfalle Music.

When he starts describing the way all of his classmates will cry “all hail the Brain,” Brown abruptly changes to a Hoedown style²⁰ (Ex. 7.19). The hoedown increases the energy and gives a festive atmosphere. In the middle of this section Brown inserts a three-beat measure, throwing the driving hoedown off balance for a moment (Ex. 7.20). This is an unexpected style change, reminding the audience that it is part of Evan’s imagination.

The musical score for Ex. 7.19 is divided into two systems. The first system features a vocal line with a tempo marking of $\text{♩} = 160$ and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line has four measures with notes and rests, with chords $Ebm7/A\flat$, $A\flat7$, $Ebm7/A\flat$, and $A\flat7\#5$ indicated above. The piano accompaniment has two staves, with the right staff starting at mp and the left staff at f . The second system is labeled "Hoedown" and features a vocal line with the lyrics "All Hail the Brain!" and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line has four measures with notes and rests, with chords $D\flat$ and $Ebm/D\flat$ indicated above. The piano accompaniment has two staves, with the right staff starting at mf and the left staff at f .

Ex. 7.19. Jason Robert Brown, *13*, “All Hail the Brain,” mm. 21-28. © 2006 by Seminole Farfalle Music.

²⁰ Hoedown music is in duple meter and is associated with folk and square dances in the United States. “Hoedown,” *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/13126, accessed 2 June 2015.

Fast

B \flat

E7 E \flat 7 D7

- man!"

D \flat D6

"All Hail the Brain!"

Ex. 7.20. Jason Robert Brown, *I3*, “All Hail the Brain,” mm. 37-43. © 2006 by Seminole Farfalle Music.

After the hoedown, Brown again switches to a different style, which he marks as “Breakdown.” This section functions as a pattersong,²¹ with Evan rapidly describing his plan (Ex. 7.21). The “Breakdown” is written in the style of Southern gospel, with the bass line moving through scale degrees 1, 3, 4, #4, 5 and back to 1 in a syncopated rhythm.

²¹ Pattersong is a style made popular by Gilbert and Sullivan’s operettas.

Breakdown

Wait 'till Mom goes to sleep, Then sneak the li - cense from the

Both hands 8vb

p

Ex. 7.21. Jason Robert Brown, *13*, “All Hail the Brain,” mm. 56-58. © 2006 by Seminole Farfalle Music.

The texture during the “Breakdown” is much thinner, as the accompaniment is only the bass line in octaves. This allows Evan to speak in a hushed tone, so that it is clear that his plan is kept secret from the adults. Brown uses this technique of changing styles throughout *13*, particularly in the opening. It creates a sense of unpredictability and disorder, much like the teenage experience.

In “The Schmuel Song” from *The Last Five Years*, Brown writes a sudden change in style at the bridge section to evoke nostalgia. The chorus of this song is written in common time in a funk pop fusion. When the bridge arrives, however, Brown switches into a waltz without warning, marked *Piu mosso* (Ex. 7.22)

Moderato
Am7(b5)

(♩ = ♩)

nine - fif - teen all a-round the world! Ev-'ry

cut and stich was a per - fect fit, As if God Him-self were con - trol - ing it! And

D Eb(#11)/D D Eb(#11)/D D/C C9 D/C C9

Ex 7.22. Jason Robert Brown, *The Last Five Years*, “The Schmuel Song,” mm. 75-80. © 2002 by Jason Robert Brown.

The text in this moment is significant to the meter change. Here Jamie describes the tailor Schmuel, who is sewing a dress he meant to make decades ago:

Every cut and stitch was a perfect fit
As if God Himself were controlling it!
And Schmuel cried through a rush of tears
"Take me back! Take me back all forty-one years!"

The switch to a waltz, in this case, is meant to evoke feelings of nostalgia as the tailor Schmuel is briefly transported back in time. The waltz is a European inspired dance form that conjures feelings of ancestry and heritage. There are several instances where

American musical theater uses the waltz to represent the European values of classical music, also in Sondheim's *A Little Night Music*, discussed in Chapter V.²² The early operettas *Blue Paradise* (Eysler, Romberg and Edwards, 1915), *Maytime* (Romberg, 1917) and *Blossom Time* (Berte, 1921), all use recurring waltz duets to evoke nostalgia and loss.²³ "Edelweiss" is sung within *The Sound of Music* (1959) to suggest pride in the Austrian homeland. Similarly, "Sunrise Sunset" from *Fiddler on The Roof* (1964) prompts Tevye's family to reminisce about their younger days.

In *I3*, Brown uses an abrupt change of style in the song "Get Me What I Need." In this song, Archie pleads with Evan to help him convince Kendra to take him on a date. The song is written in a pop rock style with a moderate tempo (Ex. 7.23). Whenever this style is present, Archie is directing his speech at Evan. In measure 49, Archie breaks away from his focus on Evan and fantasizes about Kendra. Kendra appears onstage for a short dream ballet sequence. The music for this dream ballet becomes much more ethereal in a smooth jazz style, reminiscent of a nightclub. This is accomplished through a melody with longer note values, as well as repeated B^{b9#11} and G^{b9#11} chords (Ex. 7.24). By using the smooth jazz style for Kendra in the midst of a pop rock song, Brown displays that Archie takes on new, less self-centered emotions when he thinks of her.

²²Kathryn Ann Tremper Edney, "'Gliding through our Memories': The Performance of Nostalgia in American Musical Theater." Order No. 3363880, Michigan State University, 2009, In PROQUESTMS ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Full Text, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/304943277?accountid=12085>, accessed 4 July 2013.

²³ Everett and Laird, *Cambridge Companion*, 75.

Easy Shuffle

Ex. 7.23. Jason Robert Brown, *13*, “Get Me What I Need,” mm 4-9. © 2006 by Seminole Farfalle Music.

Easy Shuffle

get me what I need! And what I need is

Ken - dra! Beau - ti - ful Ken - dra! Won - der - ful

Ken - dra! Ken - dra! Ken - dra! Ken - dra!

Ex. 7.24. Jason Robert Brown, *I3*, “Get Me What I Need,” mm 46-52. © 2006 by Seminole Farfalle Music.

Also in *I3*, Brown writes a shift of style in the opening number “Thirteen/ Becoming a Man” that does not directly relate to the text of the song. The shift comes towards the end of the number, after it has been established that all of Evan’s friends are excited to come to his birthday party and Evan has sung about his anticipation of finally becoming a man. After a final statement of the chorus, the accompaniment changes from the pop rock style that had been used in all previous choruses into “Latin Rock.” The chorus continues the “thirteen” lyric on beats 4 and 1 of each measure, with the same vocal phrasing they had in the chorus, but different characters scat within the new style

(Ex. 7.25). This Latin rock lasts only eight bars, and is followed by five measures that end the tune in the previous pop style. The switch to Latin rock prompts a celebratory mood in a dance style as teens look forward to the party that will secure Evan's adulthood.

$\text{♩} = 140$

Latin Rock

B \flat B \flat /D E \flat C/F C C7/E F G7sus

CASSIE:

Some - bod-y's grow-in' up! Scat -----

teen! Thir - teen! Thir -

ff

C C7/E F G7sus C C7/E F

EDDIE: OTHERS: MALCOLM:

teen! Scat ----- Thir - teen! Scat -----

Ex. 7.25. Jason Robert Brown, *13*, “Thirteen/Becoming a Man,” mm. 209-215. © 2006 by Seminole Farfalle Music.

Jewish Musical Gestures

Jason Robert Brown's maternal grandfather was an orthodox Jew, and Brown spent much of his childhood visiting him in the Bronx.²⁴ As a young composer, Brown performed an original song at his own Bar Mitzvah. The only musical relative in Brown's ancestry that he can recall is his great-grandfather who was a Klezmer violinist who played for the village weddings.²⁵ Since Brown writes shows that are of a deeply personal nature, many of his title characters are Jewish. The following section organizes his treatment of Jewish music from each of the four musicals, in chronological order.

Songs for a New World

Brown alludes to God in subtle ways throughout *Songs for a New World*, but not necessarily from a Jewish perspective. In the first number after the opening, "On the Deck of the Spanish Sailing Ship, 1492," the captain of the ship sings a prayer to God for safety in the voyage. The most logical assumption is that it is Christopher Columbus making his famed voyage to America, but Scott Miller suggests another option, that it was a ship of Jews expelled from Spain in 1492 because of the Spanish Inquisition.

Miller writes,

[the Jews] were given the choice of converting to Christianity or to leave the country within three months. Here was a group of outcasts heading for a literal new world, a world of all new rules, freedom from old dangers, but new dangers to replace them, a new world which will become a metaphor for the emotional and intellectual new worlds the other characters will find."²⁶

²⁴ Curt Schleier, "The Year of Jason Robert Brown," *The Jewish Daily Forward*, 18 February 2014, available online: <http://blogs.forward.com/the-arty-semite/192803/the-year-of-jason-robert-brown/> accessed 19 June 2014.

²⁵ Gregory Bossler, "Jason Robert Brown Interview" *The Dramatist*. Available online: http://oldredhills.tripod.com/parade_dramatistjrb.html. Accessed 19 June 2014.

²⁶ Miller, *Rebels With Applause*.

The many references to God in this song set up a metaphoric pattern for the rest of the show. Later songs “Christmas Lullaby” and “I’m Flying Home” are both sung as direct prayers to God, and “King of the World” references God several times. The inclusion of Christmas material—both in “Christmas Lullaby” and “Surabaya Santa”—displays that Brown is not writing from a specifically Jewish perspective. In both “Flagmaker, 1775,” and “The River Won’t Flow,” the singer references praying. Conversely, there are also songs where the singer is in a time of tribulation and makes no mention of God, including “I am Not Afraid of Anything,” and “Just One Step.” In “The River Won’t Flow,” there is an emphasis on the power of luck, and the lyrics even state: “it’s not about God and the master plan.” The overarching moral theme throughout *Songs For a New World* is about starting over, and Brown provides mixed messages about whether faith is an important part of that or not. In these examples from *Songs For a New World*, God is only vaguely referenced. Each of these uses only textual references, and do not contain religious musical idioms.

Parade

Parade is Brown’s only show based on a historical plot, and it is also his most manifest expression of his Jewish roots. Brown described himself as being a “New York City cultural Jew,” until he worked on *Parade*, an experience that renewed his faith.²⁷ *Parade* is set outside Atlanta at the turn of the twentieth century. It tells the true story of the highly publicized trial of Jewish shopkeeper Leo Frank that led to anti-Semitic tensions throughout Georgia. It was a result of this trial that the Anti-Defamation League

²⁷ Jason Robert Brown, Interview. *Lincoln Center Theater*, 13 January 1999, available online: <http://www.lct.org/showMain.htm?id=97>, accessed 19 2014.

was formed in 1913.²⁸ Brown has stated that it was easy for him to relate to the characters as he wrote *Parade*, and that the show became a vehicle for a revitalized commitment to his Jewish heritage.²⁹

Parade's Jewish content is mostly found in the subject matter and the characters. Brown uses a score influenced primarily by folk and pop idioms, which are discussed later in this chapter. The majority of the songs do not contain Jewish musical idioms, with one exception: in the moments before he is hung, Leo sings a sad *She'ma* a cappella.³⁰

The Last Five Years

The Last Five Years is the show in which Brown found it easiest to "get into the character."³¹ This character is Jamie Weilerstein, an arrogant Jewish novelist living in New York City who is experiencing marital problems with his wife, Cathy.

Brown references Jamie's Jewish heritage repeatedly throughout the musical, although, as in the previous two shows, he does this more through the lyrics than the musical style. Jamie's opening song, "Shiksa Goddess," mentions the "JCC of Spring Valley," and that he is tired of dating Jewish women.³² After listing a dozen women with clearly Jewish names, Jamie explains his devotion to his religion:

I've been wandering through the desert
I've been beaten, I've been hit
My people have suffered for thousands of years
And I don't give a shit!

²⁸ Anti-Defamation League Website, available http://archive.adl.org/adlhistory/1913_1920.html#.U6L93lysZg0, accessed 19 June 2014.

²⁹ Schleier, "Jason Robert Brown."

³⁰ The *She'ma* is the title of a prayer that serves as the centerpiece of the Jewish morning and evening prayer services.

³¹ Schleier, "Jason Robert Brown."

³² "JCC" refers to Jewish Community Center.

Similarly, when Cathy sings “Summer in Ohio,” she angrily sings to Jamie that he should “Hurry up Schmuck!” and come visit her while she is working in summer stock theater. The song is written in a pop style with a shuffle beat.

Brown uses primarily pop and rock styles throughout the score, although he also uses Jewish elements. As discussed in Chapter IV, “Shiksa Goddess” moves back and forth between a Latin style and a Rock n’ Roll style. Laced within this context, Brown juxtaposes a Klezmer fiddle solo line as he lists the long line of Jewish women who do not interest him. The accompaniment is Latin, yet the solo line follows a Phrygian dominant scale,³³ often associated with Klezmer music. The violin is a primary instrument associated with the Klezmer style, for both its expressive versatility and its ability to ornament with ease.³⁴ Later, the violin solo continues, but its melody changes to adapt to the Latin style.

Brown’s quintessential Jewish number appears midway through the show in the storytelling number “The Schmuel Song.” Jamie acts as both the narrator and old Schmuel, tailor of the shop in Klimovich. On the original soundtrack, Norman Leo Butz sings the song with the thick accent of a haggard, aging, Jewish man.³⁵ The song opens in the key of F# harmonic minor, utilizing the raised seventh and the lowered sixth scale degrees throughout the opening, common in Middle Eastern music (Ex. 7.26).

³³ A scale constructed by raising the third scale degree of the Phrygian mode.

³⁴ Edwin Seroussi, et al. "Jewish music." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed 21 June 2014, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/41322pg4>.

³⁵ Brown was the music director for this recording.



Ex. 7.26. Jason Robert Brown, *13*, “The Schmucl Song,” mm. 1-4. © 2002 by Jason Robert Brown.

In the bridge, Brown shifts both tonality and meter into a brief, brisk waltz section (Ex. 7.27). The key is D major, the chord progression oscillating between D (tonic) and E^{b11} (tritone substitution for the dominant). More than any of the other three musicals, *The Last Five Years* displays the most frequent use of Jewish musical ideas. This is likely because of Brown’s strong association with the character of Jamie, and the autobiographical nature of the show as representative of his own life.

Piu mosso

Ex. 7.27. Jason Robert Brown, *The Last Five Years*, “The Schmucl Song,” mm. 77-80. © 2002 by Jason Robert Brown.

13

Brown describes *13* as autobiographical in that it describes his own realization of “finding himself.”³⁶ The plot revolves around Evan Goldman, a 12-year-old boy who endures many trials as he tries to get all the cool kids to attend his upcoming Bar Mitzvah. The first moment of the show presents young Evan surrounded by a group of Rabbis who sing to him a Hebrew prayer. This theme comes back later in the score in the middle of “Getting Ready.” Evan sings the same prayer in counterpoint with the other characters as they strive for popularity.

The very concept of *13* suggests that Brown doesn’t take his Jewishness too seriously. He uses the other gentile characters to openly mock Evan’s heritage throughout the show. In “All Hail the Brain/Terminal Illness,” Evan’s friend Archie sings “...and who can complain? Except for you because you’re Jewish and you always complain,” to which Evan responds enthusiastically, “it’s true!” The music that accompanies this section is in the style of a classic vaudevillian soft shoe (ex. 7.28). The vaudeville style suggests showmanship, appropriate for this section because the two boys are describing how they will be putting on a show to convince Evan’s mother that Archie has a fatal disease.

³⁶ Though he wrote the musical about thirteen-year-olds, Brown reports that his actual self-realization came at the age of thirty.

Soft-Shoe (♩ = ♩³)

D9 Em7 F dim D7

cause...

mp *lightly*

G E7 F#m7 Gm6 E/G#

No one says "no" to a boy with a ter - mi - nal ill - ness

p

Ex. 7.28. Jason Robert Brown, *13*, “All Hail the Brain/Terminal Illness,” mm. 151-156.
© 2006 by Seminole Farfalle Music.

This same irreverent pattern holds true for much of the musical. Although the plot is explicitly Jewish with occasional jokes about Evan’s heritage, the score holds very few Jewish musical elements. There are textual references within songs, but they are independent of the style. Brown borrows from numerous styles in this show as previously mentioned, including blues, funk, pop, and rock. Brown chose to avoid Jewish musical idioms, with the exception of the opening. This may be because Brown describes *13* as “[Evan’s] struggle to figure out which crowd he's supposed to be a part of, where he's

supposed to fit in.”³⁷ The sudden changes between styles represent this struggle, with nothing quite settling in as comfortable. By not including Jewish elements, perhaps Brown is suggesting that Evan’s faith will not play a major role in his identity as he grows into manhood.

Southern Musical Gestures

Parade is set in Georgia, in 1913. Because of the specificities of the location and time period, Brown intentionally uses appropriate musical styles. The protagonist, Leo Frank, is Jewish, and this vaguely contributed to the musical language of *Parade*. In addition to including Jewish musical elements in the show, Brown also wanted to create a score that was classically American, specifically southern American. Since Jews created the American musical theater language almost singlehandedly, Brown knew that this would be the larger challenge. “Even popular songs of the 1920s were very much Jewish/vaudeville-oriented,” Brown writes, “Trying to find a sound that was authentically Southern was the harder task.”³⁸ To accomplish this, he turned to two genres associated with black plantation songs following the American Civil War, ragtime and blues.

Ragtime

Brown uses ragtime numerous times throughout *Parade*, another distinctly American genre that originated in the African American community.³⁹ “Rags” are typically in duple meter and major mode, and display syncopated melodies as well as a

³⁷ Robert Simonson, “Playbill.com’s Brief Encounter with Jason Robert Brown, 3 January 2007, online: www.playbill.com/celebritybuzz/article/playbill.coms-brief-encounter-with-jason-robert-brown-137402, accessed 2 June 2015.

³⁸ Mollie Wilson, “Popularity Contests,” *Tablet, A New Read On Jewish Life*, 13 February 2007, available online: <http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-arts-and-culture/theater-and-dance/1090/popularity-contests>, accessed 19 June 2014.

³⁹ Berlin, “Ragtime.”

Ragtime is generally regarded as a piano style, which is appropriate, as Brown prefers to fill his orchestrations with technical piano parts. The *Parade* orchestra features instruments that are characteristic of a ragtime band including clarinet, trombone (known for glissandi in this style), trumpet, and piano.⁴² When the orchestration is reduced for the printed Vocal Selections, the accompaniment is appropriately translated into the solo piano ragtime style.

Blues

Brown's most dominant style throughout *Parade* is blues. In "Big News!," Brown indicates that the tempo should be performed in a "Sloppy Blues" style. Blues first rose to popularity following the civil war, particularly among the southern black community.⁴³ The blues piano style borrows the pianistic elements of ragtime, including the distinctive left hand pattern and an improvisatory right hand, both present in "Big News!" (Ex. 7.30). The "sloppy" blues style that Brown indicates is appropriate, because a drunken reporter who is lamenting the lack of a quality news story in Atlanta performs this song.

⁴² Berlin, "Ragtime."

⁴³ Paul Oliver, "Blues," *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/03311, accessed 25 June 2015.

Sloppy Blues (♩ = 112) ♩ = ♩³♩

Big News! An-oth-er stir - cra - zy freak in At - lan - taaa...

Ex. 7.30. Jason Robert Brown, *Parade*, “Big News!, mm. 54-56. © 1999 by Jason Robert Brown.

Later, in “Blues: Feel the Rain Fall,” Brown uses a predecessor of the blues called a “field holler,” a work song associated with southern black Americans. A field holler is free in form but maintains melodic and rhythmic characteristics of blues, often using repeated, simple words, emphasized with melismatic vocal falls.⁴⁴ The black factory worker, Jim Conley, is convicted as an accessory to the murder of Mary Phagan, refusing to change his testimony despite inconsistencies with the evidence. The mournful nature of a field holler is appropriate to the imprisoned singer, and repetition of the phrase “hey yeah” is performed in a call-and-response pattern with Jim’s chain gang.

Brown frequently uses blues when black characters are singing in *Parade*. In “Interrogation: I’m Trying To Remember,” the African-American night watchman describes how he found the body of Mary Phagan. Although the lyrics are free of

⁴⁴ Paul Oliver, “Field holler,” *Grove Music Online*, *Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/49331 accessed 25 June 2015.

emotion, the melancholy tune of the blues, intensified by his labored, mournful vocal tone, reveals his feelings of the experience. Furthermore, the black Americans of the community sing “A Rumblin’ and A Rollin,” commenting on the potential ramifications of the trial had the victim been black. The blues style supports the moaning lyrics, “I can tell you this, as a matter of fact, that the local hotels wouldn’t be so packed, If a little black girl had gotten attacked.” By consistently utilizing the blues style for southern Black Americans, Brown emphasizes their plight while also mirroring the Jewish oppression for which this historical trial is known.⁴⁵

The Influence of Charles Ives

In addition to ragtime and blues, Brown turned to the ideas of Charles Ives for a distinctly American sound. Though Ives was a northerner from Connecticut, Brown felt that many of his musical styles embodied 1913 Americana. Brown describes the musical culture of that time period in an interview: “...ragtime was just coming out [sic], and at the same time there was still all of the old European tradition, and people singing parlor songs around the piano. So there were [sic] all of these kinds of things garbled together and mixing and starting to become a music of their own.”⁴⁶

Brown favored a technique used by Ives of overlapping melodies, creating a sort of organized cacophony. Ives also borrowed music that was distinctly American: marching band tunes and textures, rags, folk tunes, hymnody, and gospel music, even

⁴⁵ These songs are not printed in the Vocal Selections, so no musical example is included.

⁴⁶ Jason Robert Brown, Interview, *Lincoln Center Theater*, 13 January 1999, available online: <http://www.lct.org/showMain.htm?id=97>, accessed 19 June 2014.

directly quoting melodies at times.⁴⁷ The opening scene of *Parade* features a lone Civil War soldier in the song “The Old Red Hills of Home.” As the song progresses, time lapses to 1913, and the same soldier prepares to ride in a Memorial Day parade in Atlanta, Georgia. After the century change, Brown begins to incorporate sounds of a marching band to signify early 20th century America, a time when marching bands were prominent and a strong symbol of patriotism. The following brief song, “The Dream of Atlanta,” is a single strain written in a march style. The townspeople sing of their love for their community, describing themselves as “proud and free.” The music is a powerful representation of the transition into the new era from the militaristic Civil War of the opening. It also opens the show with a joyful and hopeful atmosphere, which is soon after shattered by the dark murder of Mary Phagan.

Later, Brown also uses a recognizable folk tune in *Parade* with Daniel Decatur Emmett’s tune “Dixie” (Ex. 7.31). Brown quotes this tune in “How Can I Call This Home?,” establishing irony as the tune is juxtaposed with the text. After Leo sings of wanting to be anywhere else, the tune of Dixie associated with the lyrics: “I wish I was in the land of cotton” is heard. A small chorus sings this line with the following modification: “la-la-la-la-in the land of cotton” (Ex. 7.32).

⁴⁷ J. Peter Burkholder, et al, "Ives, Charles," *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/A2252967>, accessed 19 June 2014.

Moderate

Oh I wish I was in the land of cot-ton, old times there are not for-got-ten, Look a way! Look a - way! Look a - way! Dix-ie Land. In — Dix - ie Land where

Ex. 7.31. Daniel Decatur Emmett, “Dixie,” mm. 1-10. Public Domain.

Legato

look out on all this, How can I call this home?

4 or 5 ENSEMBLE:
La la la la la the land o' cot-ton...

Ex. 7.32. Jason Robert Brown, *Parade*, “How Can I Call This Home,” mm. 33-35. © 1999 by Jason Robert Brown.

Adam Roberts suggests that the good-natured feel of the “la-la-la-la” lyric is directly mocking Leo’s unhappiness in his present circumstances.⁴⁸ Brown quotes “Dixie” a total of three times in the song, often in the bass line to humorously deride Leo (Ex. 7.33). “Dixie” rose to popularity in the south during the Civil War, and to many was considered the “unofficial anthem of the Confederacy,”⁴⁹ despite the fact that its

⁴⁸ Adam Roberts, “An Analysis of Musical Narrative,” 33.

⁴⁹ Robert Jones, “Uncle Dan Emmett’s “Dixie,”” *Journal of the Illinois State*

composer was from Ohio.⁵⁰ To factory workers in 1913 Georgia, the tune of “Dixie” would carry connotations of racial oppression.

Moderate

lan - ta, But not mine! Not mine! A Yan - kee with a We stand to - geth - er

ENSEMBLE (div. a 3):

f *marcato* *ff* *f*

Ex. 7.33. Jason Robert Brown, *Parade*, “How Can I Call This Home?,” mm. 63-38. © 1999 by Jason Robert Brown.

Ives quoted the tune of “Dixie” in his own writing no less than nine times.⁵¹ The opening line in his song, “The Things our Fathers Loved,” uses the same motive for the first two measures, paired with different words (Ex. 7.34).

Historical Society (1908-1984) Vol. 56, No. 2, Civil War Centennial (Summer, 1963), 367.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 367.

Slowly and sustained

p

I think there must be a place in the soul all made of tunes, of

pp

pp

ten.

Ex. 7.34. Charles Ives, "The Things our Fathers Loved," mm. 1-4. Public Domain.

Brown also quotes from American hymnody in *Parade*, in "There is a Fountain/It Don't Make Sense," the song used at Mary Phagan's funeral. The song uses the hymn "There is a Fountain Filled With Blood," written by Lowell Mason and William Cowper in 1792. The choice of this hymn is significant, because of the textual focus on forgiveness (Ex. 7.35).

⁵¹ Christopher Ballantine, "Charles Ives and the Meaning of Quotation in Music," *Musical Quarterly* 65, no. 2 (Apr 01, 1979): 167, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1290849376?accountid=12085>, accessed 14 July 2014.

♩ = 65

VERSE

There is a foun - tian filled with blood Drawn from Im - ma - nu - el's veins; And

sin - ners, plunged be - neath that flood, Lose all thier guilt - y stains: Lose

all their guilt - y stains, _____ Lose all their guilt - y _____ stains; And

sin - ners, plunged be - neath that flood, Lose all their guilt - y stains.

Ex. 7.35. Lowell Mason and William Cowper, "There is a Fountain Filled with Blood." Public Domain.

Ives had the ability to make hymns sound both traditional and non-traditional at the same time. He primarily used tertian harmonies, but they are often non-functional and stacked into polychords.⁵² This can be observed in Ives's song "The Watchman!" based on a hymn tune of Lowell Mason. In the opening of this song, Ives uses dissonant piano rhythms and polymeter. The introduction is intentionally tonally and rhythmically ambiguous, with no specific tonal center (Ex. 7.36). When the voice enters, the hymn setting becomes simple. Ives also writes polymeter between the two parts—the voice is singing in triple meter while the piano is written in duple. The entrance of the voice relieves the tension initiated by the improvisatory introduction. The text is one of hope, looking forward to the promise of a better future,

⁵² Janet Gilman, "Charles Ives - Master Songwriter: The Methods Behind His Madness," Order No. 9600982, University of Southern California, 1994, in PROQUESTMS ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Full Text, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/304152644?accountid=12085>, 47.

Watchman, tell us of the night,
 What its signs of promise are:
 Traveller, o'er yon mountain's height,
 See that glory beaming star!

The dissonant introduction represents the troubles and the angst of the present, but is released into musical simplicity at the positive text. Ives also used the tune to “There is a Fountain Filled With Blood,” in his “Trio for Violin, Cello, and Piano,” as well as in at least a dozen other works.⁵³

⁵³ J. Peter Burkholder, ““Quotation” and Emulation: Charles Ives's Uses of His Models,” *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 71, No. 1 (1985), 24.

Andante Con Moto

mf

Watch - man, tell us

mp

of the night, what its signs of ___ prom - ise ___ are: Traveller, o'er yon

mp

Ex. 7.36. Charles Ives, "The Watchman," mm 1-10. Public Domain.

After “There is a Fountain” is sung through two verses, Brown segues into an original song “No, it Don’t Make Sense,” sung by Frankie, Mary’s friend. Brown uses the hymn tune from “There is a Fountain” for the chorus. The use of this text becomes even more poignant as the song arrives at its climax. Frankie sings a bridge in which he prophecies justice against Leo Frank:

God forgive me what I wish right now.
 I don't know the coward's name.
 I don't know the bastard's face.
 But I swear right now to God:
 He ain't never gonna get away with what he done to Mary!
 Let him quiver in his boots!
 Let him run until he bleeds!
 I won't rest until I know
 He's burning in the ragin' fires of Hell forevermore!

As he sings the final word, the chorus enters with the hymn as Frankie sings in counterpoint: “God forgive me what I wish right now.” Even after Leo Frank is pronounced guilty, it is friends of Mary who kidnap him from his prison cell and commit his lynching. These are the same friends who sang this hymn of forgiveness at her funeral.

Brown borrowed Ives’s overlapping style in the moment during the trial when Leo Frank is pronounced guilty during “Summation and Cakewalk.” As it plays out, each juror cries out, “guilty!” in turn, accompanied by the clanging of a bell with each declaration. As the pronouncement continues, a ragtime melody is superimposed.⁵⁴ The rag has four beats per measure, while the trial music continues with three beats per measure. Both are in the same tempo; during the brief moments where both tunes are heard there is a unique polyrhythmic effect. The rag music eventually takes over in

⁵⁴ Because the full score was not available for the purposes of this research, this example can only be discerned from listening to the Broadway cast recording.

volume and the trial music fades out, contributing to an overall atmosphere of gaiety as the townspeople rejoice over the verdict. The hymn was dark and somber, accentuated by the bell tones, and the following rag, a style associated with upbeat dances, triumphs.⁵⁵ What began as a funeral dirge turns into celebration, exhibited in the musical style changes. In the final moments of this instrumental musical number, a train whistle is heard and a second band begins to play, this time in the style of a brass marching band. This second tune is also in major with four beats per measure, but is in a completely different tempo, making the overall effect cacophonous and chaotic. This number ends the act with the sense that everything is out of control, which is consistent with the plot. Leo Frank has just been convicted of raping and murdering Mary Phagan, a shocking turn of events after Brown paints Leo as “the good guy” both musically and textually throughout the first act.

Conclusions

Jason Robert Brown’s eclectic use of styles makes it difficult at times to define elements of his own style. His brief use of the fugue, a classical style, in *The Last Five Years* is rare, and it is much more common for him to borrow modern styles such as gospel, jazz, and funk, either to enhance the setting, or for parody or irony.

Brown aligns with many other modern composers in this regard. His allusions are similar to Andrew Lloyd Webber’s use of popular styles in his musicals. *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* features an eclectic array of styles such as country western, rap, and calypso. Webber also uses a blues style throughout the score of *Cats* to

⁵⁵ Edward Berlin, "Ragtime," *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/A2252241, accessed 2 June 2015.

represent the villainous Macavity. Disney productions use this technique, adapting musical styles to represent the setting, such as in African styles in *The Lion King*, Arabian music in *Aladdin*, and Native American style in *Pocahontas*.

Brown's allusions to popular styles separates his works from Sondheim's. Sondheim does not use popular styles in his musicals, but instead has developed his own characteristic sound related more to classical composers; for example, *A Little Night Music* is described by critics as a blending of ideas of Mahler, Strauss, Ravel, Liszt, and Rachmaninoff.⁵⁶ While Brown's work does reflect Sondheim's ideas and compositional philosophies, his use of styles in his musicals more closely adheres to the commercialized megamusical.

⁵⁶ "Stephen Sondheim," *Encyclopedia of World Biography*, 2nd Ed. 17 Vols., Gale Research, © 1998 Gale Research. Online, www.pbs.org/wnet/broadway/stars/stephen-sondheim/ accessed 25 June 2015.

CHAPTER VIII

JASON ROBERT BROWN'S MUSICAL STYLE: CONCLUSIONS

Prior studies within musical theater scholarship have shown that music is what creates, maintains, and peaks the dramatic intensity. Most scholarship, however, does not address how this is achieved. This research describes aspects of Jason Robert Brown's compositional style, and how he uses music elements to enhance the drama.

This study of Brown's musical style suggests two primary reasons why his music is attractive. First, Brown writes with strong dramatic intention, intertwining meaning into every musical gesture. Second, the styles, forms, and rhythms that he uses are consistent with popular styles, providing potential to reach an audience base beyond the musical theater elite.

The four musicals considered in this research were *Songs for a New World*, *Parade*, *The Last Five Years*, and *13*. Chapter V discussed song types and forms. While Brown has departed from the many forms established during the Golden Age of musical theater, this is not unusual, since most modern composers have also done so. Keeping in line with other composers, Brown has retained the eleven o'clock number as the pivotal, (oftentimes) penultimate song of the show, and also uses this number throughout his concept musicals. He writes in popular forms with repetitive sections, predominantly the AABA song form retained from Tin Pan Alley in the 1920s and 1930s. Chapter VI

outlined his rhythmic style, stressing that his meter and forms are largely determined by dramatic impulses.

Brown's propensity to write in different musical styles was discussed. He often borrows music from different milieus as appropriate to the setting of the show, or to represent a character. The research showed that in both cases, Brown uses these styles for subversive reasons, always adding to the onstage drama. Additionally, Brown's Jewish heritage contributes to the content, though not necessarily the musical language, of many of his musicals.

Even more so than his musicals, Jason Robert Brown is often praised for his stand-alone songs. *The Last Five Years* never made it to Broadway, but has risen to popularity because of the personal nature of the songs; it also almost began as a song cycle. At a time when book musicals dominate the Broadway landscape, Brown flourishes when writing songs outside of a dramatic narrative.

John Bucchino is another musical theater composer today who is better known for his songs than his shows. He and Brown are friends, and Brown arranged three numbers for Bucchino's *It's Only Life* (2008), another revue conceived and staged by Daisy Prince. In a 2014 interview, Bucchino offers an idea of why many of his own songs don't work when placed into a musical: "Some people try to impose stories on songs, and I learned that to try to impose a story, or a story moment on a song that wasn't written to do that is to make what might be a really good stand-alone song "weaker," because you're asking it to a job it wasn't meant to do and it can't help but fail."¹

¹ "John Bucchino Sings About "That Smile," Youtube, www.youtube.com/watch?v=3K1RUDpRSCQ accessed 10 May 2015.

Bucchino may have unintentionally summarized the successes and failures of composers throughout American musical theater history. While a well-written, eleven o'clock number from a book musical loses its power when removed from its dramatic context, a song originally conceived as a stand-alone song is equally ineffective when forced into one. The musical comedies of the 1930s and 1940s suffered from stand-alone songs shoved into book musicals: the songs were good but the narrative was weak. The hits of Rodgers and Hammerstein and their contemporaries from the Golden Age remain popular, but they are best appreciated when heard within the context of the show. This continues to be true of book musicals written today.

Brown and Bucchino are part of a new wave of composers who write dramatic ideas contained within a single song. This is one of the reasons both are so frequently performed in auditions and concerts, and may also explain the short runs of their musicals. Audiences have been slow to appreciate concept musicals, while book musicals continue to thrive. Even Sondheim's musicals with the most longevity—*Into the Woods*, *A Little Night Music*, *Sweeney Todd*—all contain chronological plots, reminiscent of a book musical.

As displayed in this research, Brown's style borrows from mostly popular music: jazz, blues, and funk. The main feature that each of these styles has in common is that they are rhythmically driven. Contrarily, most songs from the Golden Age are melodically driven. In general, modern pop music has become increasingly rhythmically driven, evidenced in the popularity of hip-hop, rap, techno, and minimalist styles.

This research began by citing the claim that Brown is on his way to becoming the next Stephen Sondheim. Like Sondheim, Brown is highly popular within the music

theater crowd despite struggles to keep his shows open. They have both departed from the traditional “book musical,” with Sondheim’s embracing of the concept musical and Brown’s similar approach with structure in *The Last Five Years* and thematic continuity in *Songs for A New World*. After examining Brown’s rhythmic style, song forms and types, and stylistic allusions, it seems that Brown and Sondheim do have their similarities, particularly when using musical elements to give meaning to the lyrics. Both composers use the text and the narrative to guide their musical ideas, an idea initiated by Sondheim’s mentor, Oscar Hammerstein. This can be observed in their quarter note ostinato patterns, used to create anticipation and energy. They also both use vocal unisons between two characters to signify relational closeness. The main difference between the two composers lies in their style; Brown borrows popular styles and forms, while Sondheim’s style is more classically based. Brown has the potential to surpass Sondheim’s longevity, as his musical style is more relevant to an audience beyond Broadway enthusiasts.

Brown has already become mostly known for his songs, which is a return to the genesis of American musical theater in the 1920s and 1930s, when the songs were written first and the drama was fit in around them. With *Songs For a New World*, Brown has come full circle by returning to that model and consequently finding a receptive audience.

In the beginning of the 20th century, American popular music was the music found onstage, in operettas, vaudeville, and musical comedies. It was the Rock n’ Roll era of the 1950s and 1960s that prompted popular music to move away from musical theater, as much as shows like *Hair* and *Godspell* tried to preserve a wide audience appeal. The modern musical theater scene continues to use popular styles, within an

abundance of different musical types all competing for the attention of the theater going public. Two dominant and very distinct trends have emerged in the last twenty years: the commercialized “megamusical” that relies on classic storytelling models and stock characters to deliver an expected hit, and the “Sondheim-esque” musical that tries to maintain artistic integrity while experimenting with non-traditional forms and techniques. Brown is identified as a “son of Sondheim” and thus is expected to fit into that niche, and his two experimental shows *Songs for a New World* and *The Last Five Years* certainly reflect the influence of his mentor. However, this look at Brown’s compositional style has shown that he deviates from the Sondheim school radically at times. The predominance of his use of popular song form, (namely AABA), is consistent with popular megamusicals, rather than with Sondheim’s song structures. Brown also uses many rhythmic idioms that suggest a pop style, something Sondheim avoided. Finally, the musical styles that Brown borrows for dramatic purposes are consistent with those of the composers of hit musicals such as Alan Menken, Stephen Schwartz and Andrew Lloyd Webber rather than those of Sondheim. Brown does reflect the post-Sondheim school in his treatment of rhythm and meter through his use of asymmetric and changing meters, and by experimenting with storytelling structure, such as in *Songs for a New World* and *The Last Five Years*. Therefore, Brown’s work does not fit nicely into either major musical theatre camp (popular megamusical vs. sons of Sondheim concept musical), which may explain his inability to produce a real ‘hit’ thus far.

Sondheim, now nearing the end of his career, was unable to bridge the musical theater/popular music gap because most of his songs are unable to survive as stand-alone songs. Many are too reliant on the dramatic context for their emotive qualities, including

his eleven o'clock numbers "Move On," "Being Alive," and "No One is Alone." Others do not utilize recognizable forms, resulting in a lack of musical cohesion that makes them difficult to connect with an audience. This explains his own inability to produce any real lasting hits, apart from "Send in the Clowns."

Brown's propensity to borrow numerous styles in his shows aligns him closely with Andrew Lloyd Webber, who has utilized so many familiar ideas that he has been accused of plagiarism. Many contemporary music theater composers have followed in this same vein with hopes to appeal to a varied audience, especially evidenced by recent "Jukebox musicals," featuring only pop music. Other musicals have taken that same concept and moved toward popular styles, including Stephen Schwartz's *Wicked* and *Godspell*, Elton John's *The Lion King* and *Aida*, and Marc Shaiman's *Hairspray* and *Catch Me If You Can*.

Brown demonstrates a mastery of popular styles, but has also set himself apart from Jukebox musicals, Webber, Schwartz, John, and Shaiman. Two overarching trends in his style include 1) his ability to specifically apply each style to enhance dramatic intent, and 2) to do so with musical complexity. This research described how Brown's musical choices directly relate to the narrative or character he is trying to represent. He does not use popular idioms for their own sake, but always to enhance the story, writing with a musical intelligence that shows a mastery over these styles. While popular music is often accused of being overly simplified, Brown favors styles that allow him to showcase his advanced keyboard abilities, such as ragtime, gospel, and funk. Each of these styles requires sophisticated musical thought and demands considerable technical

facility to execute properly, earning Brown the respect of musically trained artists and scholars.

In contemporary musical theater, Brown is in a category of his own. While critics like to identify him as progressive and edgy, aligned with the other “sons of Sondheim,” this research shows that his musical style is more consistent with earlier popular musicals that have become box office hits. Shows prior to the Golden Age revolved around music that was already popular, and modern theater has come full circle. The difference is that in the 1920s and 1930s the stage *created* the popular music, now it simply *reflects* it. Today’s musical theater scene is a schizophrenic mix of genres, with the megamusical and the concept musical serving as polarized opposites attracting different crowds. Brown moves back and forth between these two theater styles freely, creating a truly unique product with distinctive, though limited, appeal.

The four musicals examined in this research reveal that Brown has not settled into a specific genre over time, as composers often do. His first musical, *Songs From a New World*, was experimental, lacking a cohesive storyline. This was followed by *Parade*, a traditionally structured musical with a large cast, but which lacked the popular musical appeal. His next project, *The Last Five Years*, went in an entirely different direction. Using only two performers and no intermission, it resembles an intimate play more than a musical yet incorporated musical styles and song forms that mirror the megamusical. Brown’s next project, *13*, returned to the large, traditional musical model and continued to employ musical styles and song forms taken from the popular musical theatre genres. His most recent projects have been two movie adaptations. His personal style has yet to

be clearly established, and at this point in his career he appears to be fluctuating between traditionally conceived and experimental shows.

This oscillation indicates that, in this modern melting pot of musical theater, Brown fits into no one genre. Though he writes in many popular idioms, like the Disney and megamusical composers, his choice of subject matter and challenging material does not appeal to an audience that is primarily looking for a happy ending and a good time. What is more, the unpredictable content and dramatic style within his own shows makes it impossible for theatergoers to know what to expect from his shows. Thus, Brown is (consciously or unconsciously) reflecting the diverse culture of the modern musical.

Brown's audience thus far, including the cult-like following of the "Jason Robert Brown Generation," does not yet include the general public. In a for-profit industry that relies on ticket sales, a musical cannot survive merely on awards, positive reviews, and a relatively small following of devoted fans. For this reason, Brown's musicals are unlikely to make a profit unless they can appeal to a mass market, as so many modern musicals do.

Of *Parade*, famed director Harold Prince wrote, "I think it's wonderful material, a masterwork. And at this moment in time, I think that Jason Robert Brown hasn't yet been appreciated to the extent that he should be."² This was in 1998, and Brown continues to expand his fan base, despite the short runs of his musicals. It remains true that Brown's complexity of dramatic style deserves more attention than he has received thus far.

Now, at a time when there is repeated discussion about the future of Broadway, Jason Robert Brown is in a prime position to reunite the music of Broadway with popular

² Tepper, *Untold Stories*.

music. His styles mimic those found in pop music, and his stand-alone songs transcend the need for a full dramatic narrative to convey emotional power. When asked about the future of American musical theater, Brown replied, "I'm wondering which way things will go, same way everyone else is. Meanwhile, I just keep writing the things that are interesting to me, and hopefully people will come see them."³ These early shows may one day be considered part of his experimental phase, the process through which he developed his own voice. Until then, the American musical theater culture offers a receptive climate for Brown to explore his wide-ranging ideas. Perhaps one day he will produce a commercial hit that appeals to both the mass audience and "The Jason Robert Brown Generation." Until then, he remains a unique example of the schizophrenia that is the modern musical theatre culture.

³ oldredhills.tripod.com/JRB_MUG.html

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APPENDIX A

SONG LISTS

Songs For A New World

Song Title	Character	Song Type	Song Form	Musical Styles
The New World*	All	Opening number	AABA	“Rock Beat”
On The Deck of A Spanish Sailing Ship	A Ship Captain	Stylized	AABA	Spiritual
Just One Step	A Wealthy Wife	Power Ballad	AABA	“Fast Swing”
I’m Not Afraid of Anything*	A Young Woman	Power Ballad	AABA	“Moderate Folk Rock”
The River Won’t Flow	Two vagrant men, all	Stylized Song	AABA	Gospel
Stars and The Moon*	A Rich Woman	Simple Song	Strophic	“Gentle Folk Rock”
She Cries*	A Man	Power Ballad	AABA	
Steam Train	A Poor NY Teen, company	Stylized	AABA	Funk
The World Was Dancing	A Man		AABA	
Surabaya Santa*	Mrs. Claus	Power Ballad	AABA	“Weill-esque”
Christmas Lullaby*	A Pregnant Woman	Simple Song	ABAB	Lullaby
King of the World*	A Man in Prison	Power Ballad	AABA	“Medium Funk Feel”
I’d Give it All for You*	Former Lovers	Power Ballad/Duet	AABA	
The Flagmaker, 1776*	A Woman Whose Family is Away at War	Power Ballad	AABA	Military March
Flying Home	A Soldier Who Has Died in Battle	Power Ballad	AABA	
Hear My Song	All		AABA	

Parade

Song Title	Character	Song Type	Song Form	Musical Styles
The Old Red Hills of Home*	Two Soldiers, chorus	Power Ballad	AABA	
Anthem: The Dream of Atlanta	Townspeople	Stylized	Single verse	Traditional Marching Band
How Can I Call This Home?*	Leo Frank, Townspeople	Power Ballad (with accompaniment)	AABA	Dixie quotes
The Picture Show	Mary, Frankie	Humor Duet	AABA	
Leo at Work/What am I Waiting For?*	Leo, Lucile	Dialogue Duet	AABA	Waltz
Interrogation: I am Trying to Remember	Newt, Leo, Detective	Narrative music	Formless	
Big News!*	Britt Craig	Stylized Song	12-Bar Blues	“Sloppy Blues”
Funeral: “There is a Fountain/It Don’t Make Sense”	Frankie, Britt, Townspeople	Sequence, combination of songs	Hymn: strophic	Hymn, overlapping melodies
Real Big News	Britt Craig and Townspeople	Stylized Song	Some Blues, mostly formless	Funk Blues
You Don’t Know This Man*	Lucille	Power Ballad	AABA	
The Trial I: It Is Time Now	John, Tom, Townspeople	Narrative music	Formless	Funk
The Trial II: Twenty Miles From Marietta	Hugh Dorsey	Narrative music	Formless	
The Trial III: Frankie’s Testimony	Frankie, Mary	Narrative music	Formless	
The Trial IV: The Factory Girls/Come Up To My Office*	Leo, girls	Power Ballad	AABA (Come Up To My Office)	“Ragtime Two-Beat” (Come Up To My Office)
The Trial V: Newt Lee’s Testimony	Newt Lee	---	---	--
The Trial VI: My Child Will Forgive	Mrs. Phagan	Simple	Strophic	“Valse lente”

Me*				
The Trial VII: That's What He Said*	Jim Conley, Townspeople	Storytelling Song	ABABAB	Fast Swing
The Trial VIII: Leo's Statement: It's Hard to Speak My Heart*	Leo	Simple Song	AABA	
The Trial IX: Summation & Cakewalk	Instrumental	Instrumental	Formless	Ragtime, overlapping styles
A Rumblin' and a Rollin'	Riley, Angela, Jim, Newt	Stylized	AABA	Blues, Field Holler
Do It Alone*	Lucille	Power Ballad	AABA	
Pretty Music*	Governor John Slaton	Stylized	AABA	Ragtime Swing
Letter to the Governor	Nurse and Judge	Simple Song	Strophic	
This is Not Over Yet*	Leo, Lucille joins	Power Ballad	AABA	
Blues: Feel the Rain Fall	Jim, Chain Gang, Governor, Chain Gang Guard	Stylized Song	Call and Response	Blues, Spiritual
Where Will You Stand When the Flood Comes?	Townspeople	Narrative music	Formless — Strophic verses	
All The Wasted Time*	Leo, Lucille	Duet	ABABB	
Sh'ma	Leo	Stylized Song	Single stanza	Hebrew Prayer
Finale	Full Company			

The Last Five Years

Song Title	Character	Song Type	Song Form	Musical Styles
Still Hurting*	Cathy	Power Ballad	AABA	
Shiksa Goddess*	Jamie	Stylized	AABA	Latin Rock
See I'm Smiling	Cathy	Power Ballad	AABA	
Movin' Too Fast*	Jamie	Stylized	AABA	Funk
I'm A Part of That*	Cathy	Power Ballad	AABA	Waltz
The Schmuel Song*	Jamie	Storytelling	ABA	
A Summer In Ohio*	Cathy	Power Ballad	AABA	
The Next Ten Minutes*	Jamie, Cathy	Simple/Duet	ABA	
A Miracle Would Happen	Jamie (Cathy sings insert)	Power Ballad	AABA	
Climbing Uphill*	Cathy	Power Ballad	ABA	
If I Didn't Believe In You*	Jamie	Power Ballad	AABA	
I Can Do Better Than That*	Cathy	Power Ballad	AABA	
Nobody Needs to Know*	Jamie	Power Ballad	ABABAB	
Goodbye Until Tomorrow*	Cathy	Power Ballad	AABA	
I Could Never Rescue You	Jamie, Cathy	Power Ballad	AABA	

Song Title	Character	Song Type	Song Form	Musical Styles
Thirteen/Becoming a Man*	Evan, Company	Opening Number	AABA	“Fast Rock”/”Latin Rock”
The Lamest Place in The World*	Patrice	Power Ballad	AABA	
Get Me What I Need*	Archie	Power Ballad	AABA	“Shuffle Rock”/Disco
What It Means to Be A Friend*	Patrice	Power Ballad	AABA	
All Hail the Brain*	Evan, Company	Storytelling	ABABA	“Hoedown”, Gospel
Terminal Illness*	Evan	Stylized	AABA	“Soft Shoe”
Getting Ready	Company	Narrative	N/A	
Any Minute	Evan, Patrice, Archie, Kendra	Ballad	Strophic	
Here I Come*	Evan	Power Ballad/ Stylized Song	AABA	“Funky Disco Groove”
Bad, Bad News*	Boys Quartet	Stylized Song	AABA	Doo-wop, “Strong Blues Feel”
Tell Her*	Evan, Patrice	Simple Song	AABA	
It Can’t Be True	The Girls	Girls Chorus Number	AABA	Funk
If That’s What It Is*	Evan, Patrice, Archie	Power Ballad	AABA	
A Little More Homework*	Evan, Company		AABA	“Rock Groove”
Brand New You*	Company	Ensemble	AABA	“Funky Pop”

APPENDIX B
SYNOPSES OF THE FOUR MUSICALS

Songs for New World

Songs for a New World uses only four actors, title “Man 1,” “Man 2,” “Woman 1,” and “Woman 2.” Each scene presents a song in a different setting, presenting an overarching theme of starting over with new beginnings.

“Opening: The New World:” The entire cast introduces the idea of setting their sights on the future.

“On the Deck of a Spanish Sailing Ship, 1492:” Passengers aboard a 15th century ship beg the Lord to give them strength for their journey, finding renewed hope by the end. ”

“Just One Step:” A woman is threatening to jump from the ledge of her New York penthouse, as she complains about her husband, Murray.

“I’m Not Afraid of Anything:” A young wife appears, boldly declaring her bravery.

“The River Won’t Flow:” Two men are dreaming of the rewards of a life of hard work, denying the role of God or fate.

“Stars and the Moon:” A rich woman looks back with regret, having chosen a man with money instead of one with adventure and passion.

“She Cries:” A man fantasizes about the woman he loves, and bemoans her manipulative power to keep him returning to her.

“The Steam Train:” A poor young man in a big city dreams of life as a famous basketball star.

“The World Was Dancing:” A man struggles with his continual fear of failure, through business ventures to his future with his fiancée, Amy.

“Surabaya-Santa:” Mrs. Claus groans about Santa’s escapades, and dreads another Christmas alone.

“Christmas Lullaby:” A young pregnant woman seeks for God to bless her unborn child, comparing herself to the virgin Mary.

“King of the World:” A man sings from prison, trying to reconcile his accused sins with his arrogant sense of purpose in the world.

“I’d Give It All For You:” A separated couple looks back and regret that they ever parted.

“The Flagmaker, 1775:” The mother of an American Revolutionary soldier sews flags as she prays for the war to end.

“Flying Home:” A young man has just been killed in battle (perhaps the son of the woman in the previous song) and sings as they return his body to his home.

“Hear My Song:” The entire cast sings of the power of dreams to start their own “New World.”

Parade

The show begins during the American Civil War as a Soldier bids farewell to his lover as he prepares to fight, but the scene changes to 1913 Atlanta, GA. Leo Frank and his wife, Lucille, have just moved to the south from Brooklyn, NY to run a factory. When the body of Mary Phagan, a young factory worker, is found one morning by a black janitor, both Leo and the janitor are accused of her rape and murder. Leo goes to trial and is

pronounced guilty, despite significant inconsistencies in evidence and testimony. He is imprisoned while Lucille tries to fight for his case, which the governor agrees to reexamine. Leo's sentence is changed from the death penalty to life imprisonment, resulting in riots and looting by an angry mob. In the middle of the night, Leo is kidnapped by a group of masked men and then hung.

The Last Five Years

Jamie and Cathy have been married five years. In this show, Jamie tells his side of the story chronologically, from the time he met Cathy to the dissolution of their marriage. Cathy tells her story in reverse chronological order, beginning with their divorce in the first scene, and moving backwards to when they first met. Jamie and Cathy take turns scene-by-scene, until their narratives meet on their wedding day and they interact for the first time.

13

Evan is a 12-year-old Jewish boy from Long Island who has just moved to a small town in Indiana following his parents divorce. He is anxious to make friends so that he will be able to celebrate his upcoming Bar Mitzvah. Evan quickly befriends Patrice and Archie, but quickly realizes that they are the "geeks," so he then tries to make friends with Brett and his gang. His hope is to orchestrate the perfect date for Brett to go out with Kendra to a movie where he promises that Brett is sure to get "the tongue." In the process, Evan betrays both Archie and Patrice, losing his only genuine friends. All is resolved in the end, when Evan recognizes that Brett and his friends are not worth his friendship.