

TRU beginnings



How to Write a Musical **THAT WORKS**

A 3-part workshop exploring the traditional structure and dynamic interplay of an effective libretto and score.

Part Two: Conflict and Obstacles



How to Write a Musical **THAT WORKS**

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Schedule

12:00PM – Check in

12:15-1:00PM – introductory discussion: the three-part structure of musicals. How do you musicalize conflict in a show? Is conflict better served by song or by dialogue? Do you need a clear antagonist and/or obstacle?

PRESENTATIONS/FEEDBACK

1:00 – **THE CONFRONTATION** (conflict song/ opposing points of view) by Harry Einhorn and Lia Tamborra - *Hypatia and the Heathens*

1:30 – **TIME IS RELATIVE** (opposing points of view/persuasion) by David Quang Pham - *Ellipses*

2:00 - 2:15 Break

2:15 – **ROLE MODEL** (persuasion song) by Eric C. Jones and Ian Stephenson - *Fired!*

2:45 – **BETRAYAL/BETRAYED, ANNIE'S REVENGE** (conflict Songs) by Judith Estrine and David Kurkowski - *Sewing the Dream*

3:15-3:45 Lunch

3:45-4:15 – Discussion: The dramatic journey of characters: How wants and goals may evolve over the course of a show. Panelists will comment and invite audience feedback.

PRESENTATIONS/FEEDBACK

4:15 – **SUSANNA'S NIGHT, YOU JUST CAN'T WALK AWAY, DEAR SAM** (conflict Song) by Eric Sirota - *A Good Day*

4:45 – **LEAVE IT TO ME/VOWS** (first act finale) by Kevin Bleau and David Schrag - *Roswitha*

5:15 – **MELANCHOLY MOON, NOBODY LOVES A GYPSY, WHY AM I HERE?** (first act finale) by Carol Weiss - *The Door to America*

6:00 – 6:30 - Wrap Up Discussion

Feedback Panel

KEN CERNIGLIA, former dramaturg and Literary Manager for Disney Theatrical Group;

CHERYL DAVIS, Kleban and Larsen Award winning librettist and lyricist (*Barnstormers*),

Audelco Award winning playwright (*Maid's Door*); **PAUL GORDON**, composer/lyricist

(Broadway *Jane Eyre*; off Broadway *Daddy Long Legs*; regional *Emma*; virtual *Estella Scrooge*);

RICHARD MALTBY JR., Tony award winning director (*Ain't Misbehavin'*, *Fosse*) and award-

winning lyricist (*Closer Than Ever*, *Big, Baby, Miss Saigon*); **TAMRA PICA**, London, off-Broadway and TV producer

BOB OST, executive director of Theater Resources Unlimited, and TRU Literary Manager

CATE CAMMARATA will facilitate.

How to Write a Musical **THAT WORKS**

Part Two: Conflict and Obstacles

Three Part Structure

First Part: **THE WORLD and THE WANT**

Second Part: **CONFLICT and OBSTACLES**

Third Part: **RECKONING and RESOLUTION**

What happens in Part 1? - **THE WORLD and THE WANT**

EXPOSITION - The part of a story that introduces:

Main character(s) - the person in the story who has a need/objective (WANT) to fulfill and whose actions drive the story

Dramatic premise - what the story's about

Dramatic situation - the circumstances surrounding the action

Inciting Incident - an event that sets the plot in motion.

What happens in Part 2? CONFLICT and OBSTACLES

Obstacles - the main character(s) encounters obstacle(s) that prevent them from achieving their dramatic need.

First Culmination - a point where the main character seems close to achieving their goal/objective (WANT), then, everything falls apart, leading to the main character reaching their lowest point and seeming farthest from fulfilling their dramatic need or objective (WANT).

What happens in Part 3? **RECKONING and RESOLUTION**

Climax (Second Culmination) - The point at which the plot reaches its maximum tension and the forces in opposition confront each other at a peak emotional action.

Denouement - The brief period of calm at the end where a state of equilibrium returns.



HELPING PRODUCERS PRODUCE

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Part Two: Conflict and Obstacles

Second Part: **CONFLICT AND OBSTACLES**

INTERNAL CONFLICT SONG

(A character's internal conflict)

- 1) **Just You Wait Henry Higgins** – My Fair Lady – Eliza Doolittle
- 2) **I'm Gonna Wash That Man Right Out of My Hair** – South Pacific – Nellie Forbush
- 3) **Shall I Tell You What I Think of You?** – King and I – Anna Leonowens
- 4) **I Don't Know How to Love Him** – Jesus Christ Superstar – Mary Magdalene
- 5) **On the Steps of the Palace** - Into The Woods – Cinderella
- 6) **Tonight at Eight** – She Loves Me – Georg

CONFLICT SONG

(Conflicting points of view between characters)

- 1) **It Would Have Been Wonderful** – A Little Night Music – Company
- 2) **America** – West Side Story – Sharks/ Female and Male
- 3) **Anything You Can Do...** – Annie Get Your Gun – Annie Oakley and Frank Butler
- 4) **You're Nothing Without Me** – City of Angels – Stine and Stone
- 5) **It's All Over/And I Am Telling You That I'm Not Going** – Dreamgirls – Cast, Effie White
- 6) **All er Nuthin'** – Oklahoma – Will & Ado Annie

TURNAROUND SONG

(A character re-evaluates their goals)

- 1) **Defying Gravity** – Wicked – Elphaba
- 2) **Everything's Coming Up Roses** – Gypsy – Mama Rose
- 3) **Rosemary** – How to Succeed ... – J. Pierpont Finch
- 4) **Soliloquy** – Carousel – Billy Bigelow
- 5) **Don't Rain on My Parade** – Funny Girl – Fanny Brice
- 6) **Before the Parade Passes By** – Hello Dolly – Dolly Levi

COMMON PURPOSE SONG

(Congruous points of view among characters)

- 1) **Tonight** – West Side Story – Tony and Maria/Quintet reprise
- 2) **A Little Priest** – Sweeney Todd – Sweeney Todd and Mrs. Lovett
- 3) **Small World** – Gypsy – Mama Rose and Herbie
- 4) **People Will Say We're in Love** – Oklahoma – Curly & Laurey
- 5) **Do You Love Me?** – Fiddler on the Roof – Tevye and Golde
- 6) **Elegance** – Hello Dolly – Cornelius, Barnaby, Irene and Minnie

How to Write a Musical **THAT WORKS**

Part Two: Conflict and Obstacles

A Musical is a **HEIGHTENED REALITY**^{**}

Music tells the story

What makes a musical a musical is the practice of having characters burst *(or gently slide)* into song and dance to express their most passionate experiences. The pure emotionality of seemingly spontaneous singing, musical accompaniment and dance are the defining features of the musical.

Heightened text

Musicals require characters to sing their most passionate experiences. This simple act thrusts artists and their audience into another theatrical world when a group of musicians begins playing underneath the stage, and characters begin singing the text which is sometimes poetic, intentionally witty, powerfully emotional and always tightly constructed.

Heightened behavior

Characters in musicals often employ stylized behaviors that involve facing the audience directly, moving in highly organized choreographic patterns and abandoning the logic of typical daily activity for a more heightened vocabulary.

Heightened visual expression

We tend to identify certain patterns and practices with the musical theatre, among these are the ideas of amplified theatrical design and the elaborate use of bodies to create an imaginary world that invites the other conventions mentioned.

HEIGHTENED REALITY

All these heightened elements really add up to an elevated sense of reality. All theater, film and television are artificial and carefully selected imitations of reality. But, musical theater often puts artificiality downstage center as one of the appealing features of the art form. So, as some entertainments seek to convince us that things are completely “real,” the musical theatre embraces its own “un-realness” and makes a virtue of it. ***The higher the level of heightened reality, the more the need is for basic (or simple) structure and execution, so the audience has an easier understanding of what is to follow.***



HELPING PRODUCERS PRODUCE

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Part Two: Conflict and Obstacles

EIGHT PRINCIPLES of Musical Theater Writing

- 1) The audience meets the main characters, and must know their wants as early as possible.
- 2) The protagonists should be clear to the audience, and should be actively pursuing their want.
- 3) Songs should move the action. Book, Score and Staging must speak as One.
- 4) Find the Song Posts – points in the story where the characters’ emotions demand a song. Just adding songs won’t give you an effective musical.
- 5) Show, Don’t Tell - Important events take place onstage. Drama is expressed in action, not description.
- 6) Narrative momentum steadily builds toward a resolution. Every character, song, word and gesture has to serve a clear dramatic purpose. If it doesn’t, cut it.
- 7) Sing It or Say It; never both. If you say the same thing in a song you already have said in the dialogue, it is redundant.
- 8) Know the basics of good storytelling and tell your story in a fresh, entertaining way.

Sources:

**Beating Broadway* by Steve Cuden

***Directing in Musical Theatre: An Essential Guide* by Joe Deer

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Part Two: Conflict and Obstacles

RECOMMENDED Theater Books:

MUSICAL WRITING

Classic:

- Words with Music: Creating the Broadway Musical Libretto – Lehman Engel
- The Making of a Musical – Lehman Engel

Contemporary:

- Writing the Broadway Musical – Aaron Frankel
- The Musical Theater Writer's Survival Guide – David Spencer
- The Secret Life of the American Musical: How Broadway Shows Are Built – Jack Viertel
- Beating Broadway, How to Create Stories for Musicals: That Get Standing Ovals – Steve Cuden
- Writing Musical Theater – Allen Cohen and Steven L. Rosenhaus

MUSICAL WRITING - Music

- The Broadway Musical: A Critical and Musical Survey – Joseph P. Swain

MUSICAL WRITING - Lyrics

- Song Writing – Stephen Citron

PLAY WRITING

Classic:

- The Art of Dramatic Writing – Lajos Egri
- Aristotle Poetics – Aristotle

(Aristotle's Poetics for Screenwriters: Storytelling Secrets - simplifies the classic text – Michael Tierno)

Contemporary:

- Story: Substance, Structure, Style – Robert McKee
(A screenwriting book but a great book on in-depth dramatic writing)
- Dramatists Toolkit, The Craft of the Working Playwright – Jeffrey Sweet

PRODUCING

Classic:

- Producing Theatre: A Comprehensive and Legal Business Guide – Donald Farber
- From Option to Opening: A Guide to Producing Plays Off Broadway – Donald Farber

Contemporary:

- The Commercial Theater Institute Guide to Producing Plays and Musicals – CTI
- Producing and the Theatre Business: Working in Theatre Seminars – American Theatre Wing