

American Musical Theater from *Show Boat* to *West Side Story*: Ethnicity, Politics, Musical Style

Freshman Seminar, Fall 2005
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Syllabus

Not so long ago, the Broadway musical stood at the center of American culture, producing tunes and tales that became the hits of their day. It commented—wittily, satirically, relentlessly—on the ever-changing social landscape. This seminar will explore six iconic Broadway musicals from a variety of perspectives, including musical style, role of dance, film realizations, cultural critique, racial and ethnic identity, and politics. Its goal is in-depth, multifaceted analysis, rather than extensive coverage of repertory. Among the shows to be featured are *Show Boat*, *The Cradle Will Rock*, *Oklahoma!*, *South Pacific*, and *West Side Story*. Each will be approached from a different critical vantage point. Students will benefit from a brand-new course website, constructed in collaboration with Harvard's illustrious Theatre Collection. As a result, selected primary documents will be at our disposal. Towards the end of the term, the class will attend *Big River* at Newton's Turtle Lane Playhouse.

Course Expectations

The success of a seminar depends on each of its members. Be sure to do all the assigned reading and listening before class. Beyond that, don't just "do" it but give yourself time to absorb the sounds and ideas, to shape thoughtful critiques. Whether or not these materials are highlighted in each week's response paper, they will be addressed in class.

Prose is your vehicle for creative and intellectual expression. For each class, you will be writing a short response paper (more about that below). At intervals throughout the semester, you will be editing one another's writing. Beyond that, you will prepare two in-class presentations, each in conjunction with one or two other class members. And you will turn one of these presentations into a research paper.

At mid-semester and again at the end of the course, you will be asked to write a self-evaluation about your contribution to the class, assessing the amount and quality of energy you have invested. I will give you a written evaluation at the same time. View this class as an opportunity to spread your wings. Focus intensely on your writing; the investment will yield results.

A Note about Assignments

Abbreviations for Readings. See the appended bibliography for the full text of the citations abbreviated in weekly assignments.

Location of Materials. Many materials for the seminar are on our website. Others are on reserve in the Music Library.

Response Papers. Students will write brief papers for each class. These will be posted on the class's website by 9 a.m. on the morning of class and used as a springboard for class discussion. Each assignment tells the focus of the papers.

Length: 500-600 words

Format: double-spaced, 12-point type, Microsoft Word

View these papers as an opportunity to grow as a writer. Edit your prose vigorously. Make sure you have gone through at least 3 drafts before posting your paper. Take some chances. Write imaginatively.

Try to read through all the papers before class and formulate questions for classmates.

Text to purchase

Purchase at Harvard Coop

Geoffrey Block. *Enchanted Evenings: The Broadway Musical from Show Boat to Sondheim*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Class Website

Our course website has been constructed by Harvard's Instructional Computing Group in conjunction with the Harvard Theatre Collection. In addition to the usual materials for assignments, it is exceptional in featuring primary sources from the Theatre Collection, including reviews of shows, debut programs, and photographs. This rich cluster of materials will provide students with a unique opportunity to engage with primary sources. Roam around in the website a bit. See "Report on Research Methods" (under "Syllabus" on the website) for a description of how the site was compiled.

Class Schedule—Summary

Note: The schedule below is subject to change as the semester unfolds and we get to know one another.

September

- 27 Studying Musical Theater: A Bird's Eye View and
Show Boat (Class 1): Learning the Show and Exploring its Cultural Spheres

October

- 3 Viewing of *Show Boat* (1936) (all screenings will be in
Classroom 3 of the Music Building at 6:30 p.m.)
- 4 *Show Boat*: Learning the Show, Exploring its Cultural Spheres (Class 1
concluded)
Music Library and E-Resources Orientation
- 11 *Show Boat* (Class 2): Race and Representation
- 18 *Show Boat* (Class 3): The Legacy of Minstrelsy
Visit to Harvard's Theatre Collection
- 25 *The Cradle Will Rock* (Class 1): Learning the Show and Exploring its
Cultural Spheres
- 31 Viewing of *The Cradle Will Rock* 6:30 p.m.

November

- 1 *The Cradle Will Rock* (Class 2): 1930s Progressivism and Agit-Prop
Theater
- 7 Viewing of *Oklahoma!* 6:30 p.m.
- 8 *Oklahoma!* (Class 1): Learning the Show and Exploring its Cultural
Spheres
- 15 *Oklahoma!* (Class 2): Analyzing Dance, Exploring Ethnicity
- 21 Viewing of *South Pacific* 6:30 p.m.
- 22 *South Pacific* (Class 1): Race and Representation
- 29 *South Pacific* (Class 2): Post-War American Politics

December

- 6 *Big River*: Anatomy of a Present-Day Musical
- 12 Viewing of *West Side Story* 6:30 p.m.
- 13 *West Side Story* (Class 1): Learning the Show and Exploring its Cultural
Spheres
- 20 *West Side Story* (Class 2): Ethnic Coding

SEPTEMBER 27 Studying Musical Theater: A Bird's-Eye View

Reading*

Block, Geoffrey: 3-16

Swain, Joseph: 3-14

Show Boat

Class 1 — Learning the Show and Exploring its Cultural Spheres

Reading*

Block: 19-40

Breon, Robin. [A Show Boat: The Revival, the Racism.](#) @ JSTOR

Listening

Kern. *Show Boat* [reissue of original 78 album from 1932], conducted by James Melton. Piano-Vocal score from 1927 also on reserve. Listen to approximately the first half of the show.

Response Paper

Show Boat is often described as standing at a critical historic junction in terms of its dramatic conception, musical style, and engagement with race. Engage with that idea in relation to your own experience with musicals, most of which probably post-date this show. What do you perceive as *Show Boat's* innovations? What links do you find to later works that you know well?

Website Materials

- Film clip: "Make Believe" (1936 film)
- Audio clips (plus corresponding piano-vocal scores) from both the 1932 recording and that by John McGlinn
 - "Make Believe"
 - "Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man"
 - Ol' Man River
- Sheet music: Kern's "They Didn't Believe Me"
- From Harvard's Theatre Collection
 - Clippings and programs
 - Photos from 1929 production
 - Clippings related to the 1936 film

In-Class Performances

- "Make Believe"
- "They Didn't Believe Me"

***Abbreviations for Readings:** See the appended bibliography for the full text of the citations abbreviated in weekly assignments.

OCTOBER 3 Viewing of *Show Boat* (1936). 6:30 p.m. Room 3.
Volunteer needed to retrieve film from the library.

OCTOBER 4 ***Show Boat: Learning the Show and Exploring its Cultural Spheres (Class 1, continued)***

Reading*

Swain: 15-49.

Scan materials for *Show Boat* that are on the class website, especially those connected with the premiere production.

Also, review Robin Breon's article (listed on last week's assignment), and be prepared to discuss it in class.

Questions to think about:

- What is his stance as a writer? Does he pose as a scholar? Critic? Polemicist?
- How much is the voice of the black community represented here?
- How much is the history of black musical theater factored in?
- How is the logic of the article constructed?
 - Analyze p. 92 (bottom paragraph), to top of p. 93
 - Also p. 93, 2nd and 3rd full paragraphs

Listening

Finish listening to the show

Response Paper

Construct a taxonomy of the musical styles represented in *Show Boat*, then go on to describe each. What musical traditions does each of them relate to?

In-Class Performances

"Can't Help Lovin' dat Man" and "Bill"

Looking ahead to In-Class Reports:

Look ahead to the in-class reports for Oct. 11 and 18, and email me by Monday (noon), Oct. 3, to let me know your 1st and 2nd topic choices.

During the second half of class, we will visit the Music Library and get specialized instruction in e-resources for research. Each of you should prepare at least one question about accessing materials there. Review the library's website before class.

Put on your calendar! Interview with DAWN UPSHAW, Wed., Oct. 5, 5 p.m.

***Abbreviations for Readings:** See the appended bibliography for the full text of the citations abbreviated in weekly assignments.

**OCTOBER 11 *Show Boat*
Class 2 — Race and Representation**

Reading*

Friedwald, Will. Chapter on *Old Man River*.

McMillin, Scott. *Paul Robeson, Will Vodery, and the Jubilee Singers, and the Earliest Script of the Kern Hammerstein *Show Boat**.

Geary, Lynnette G. *Jules Bledsoe: The Original *Old Man River**. JSTOR

Listening

Listen once again to *Old Man River* and watch clips on website (i.e., performances of “*Old Man River*” from 1936 and 1951 films)

Response Paper

Choose one of the readings above and discuss the perspective it brings to “*Old Man River*” or to one of the performers who became associated with the role of “*Joe*.” What racial issues does this song raise? What has its meaning become? What aspects of its musical style tag it as “African American”?

In-Class Performance

“*Old Man River*”

Website Materials

- Film clips
 - Paul Robeson’s performance of “*Old Man River*” near the beginning of the 1936 film
 - William Warfield’s performance of same from the 1951 film
- Audio excerpts (+ sheet music)
 - “*Old Man River*”
- From Harvard’s Theatre Collection
 - Paul Robeson clippings and photos

Class Presentations

During this session, we will begin an ongoing series of short reports. For the first batch, students will divide into four groups, with each assigned to one of the topics listed for this session and the next. Reports will be shaped and presented collectively. In each case, use the topic description as a springboard to devising your own vision of the presentation. Aim for a super-clear focus. You can’t cover everything in the time allotted and need to make careful choices. For source materials, draw upon our course website. Also explore the relevant secondary literature.

Report guidelines:

10-15 minutes. No more!

Prepare a handout, citing the sources used and outlining the main points discussed. If there are musical examples, they should also be included in the handout.

Keep the handouts brief (1-3 pages per presentation). Either post the handout on the class website before class (by 9 a.m.) or bring enough xeroxes for everyone.

- Give a brief sketch of Paul Robeson as a performer. What were his best-known roles? His politics? His degree of racial activism? Explore newspaper clippings on the class website to gain a contemporaneous perspective. Scan the secondary literature about him. How was Robeson perceived in his day? What role did “Ol’ Man River” play in that perception?
- Compare Robeson’s performance of “Ol’ Man River” in the beginning of the 1936 film with that of William Warfield in the film from 1951. Study both clips (found on the class website). What differences do you find in the racializing of their interpretations? In their diction and approach to the song? In their delivery of the song’s message? Consider the historical moment in which each film appeared and how that might have affected the racial message

***Abbreviations for Readings:** See the appended bibliography for the full text of the citations abbreviated in weekly assignments.

OCTOBER 18 *Show Boat* Class 3 — The Legacy of Minstrelsy

Reading

Crawford, Richard. "Blacks, Whites, and the Minstrel Stage," in *America's Musical Past*, 196-220.

Michael Rogin, "Blackface, White Noise: The Jewish Jazz Singer Finds His Voice." JSTOR. Read through materials about Jolson on the website; in folder marked "Ephemera, Al Jolson"

Also read link about "Aunt Jemima"

Listening/Viewing

Look at the film clips on the class website, listed below.

Response Paper

- Recognizing that it is impossible to absorb the complex history of American minstrelsy in preparation for one class, focus on getting a sense of the key issues that surrounded the genre and continue to haunt its legacy. This will prepare you to write the paper. Then view Jolson's performance from *Jazz Singer* (on our website). What is your initial reaction? Beyond that, link what you see to the issues in minstrelsy that you have identified.

Preparation for Class Discussion:

Be prepared to respond to Rogin's article. What is his main point? How does he reason it out? What are the tools that he uses? Be concise.

Website Materials

- Film Clips
 - From *Show Boat* (1936): Irene Dunn singing "Can't Help Lovin' dat Man" in the kitchen, and her performance of "Galavantin' Around" midway through, on the show boat's stage.
 - From Al Jolson's *Jazz Singer* (1927): shot of Jolson blacking up at a mirror and another of him singing "My Mammy"
 - Entire Jolson segment from Episode 2 of *Broadway: The American Musical* (PBS, 2004)
- From Harvard's Theatre Collection
 - Irene Dunn clippings
 - Al Jolson clippings and photos

Class Presentations. See guidelines listed under October 11th

- In the 1936 film of *Show Boat*, Irene Dunn gives two minstrel performances—one in blackface, one not. Study them carefully (clips found on class website). Explore the literature about minstrelsy—that is, including and beyond the class readings for today. Offer a cultural analysis.

During the second half of class, we will visit Harvard's Theatre Collection. Each of you should prepare at least one question about accessing materials there. Review the collection's website before class.
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OCTOBER 25

The Cradle Will Rock
Class 1 — Learning the Show and Exploring its Cultural Spheres

Reading*

Block, 115-32.

Liner notes to recording of *The Cradle Will Rock* (CRI).

Marc Blitzstein, Libretto for *The Cradle Will Rock*. Explore the libretto pages on the class website. Also read through the libretto.

Review of the show's premiere from *The New York Times*; on class website

Also, roam around the site, especially under "Clippings" and "Ephemera" to explore what is there.

Listening

Marc Blitzstein, *The Cradle Will Rock* (CRI). This material has been transferred from LP to CD and is available in the latter format in the Music Library.

Response Paper

This week's response paper will focus on Blitzstein's style. Analyze "Croon Spoon" and the "The Cradle Will Rock" [theme song]. How would you characterize Blitzstein's style—in both prose and music? What clichés does he play with? What are his distinctive traits?

In-Class Performances

We will need performances of the two numbers listed in the "response paper."

Planning Ahead

From now until the end of the semester, you will prepare two class presentations, choosing from the topics listed in assignments for the remaining classes. These reports will begin on November 1st. For the first round, look at the topics for *The Cradle Will Rock* and *Oklahoma!* (listed on assignments for 11/1, 11/8, and 11/15), and e-mail me by October 24 (9 a.m.) with your first and second choices. In each case, use the topic description as a springboard for shaping your own vision. The main point is to have a super-clear focus. Full guidelines for the reports are given on the assignment for November 1st.

One of these presentations will be shaped into a written paper of approximately 8 pages (double-spaced), which is due on December 20th. You can choose which presentation to write up. More detailed guidelines for these papers will be discussed as the semester progresses.

Website Materials

- Audio excerpts (and corresponding sheet music for some numbers)
 - Opening scene (Night Court)
 - Scene on the lawn of Mr. Mister's Home
 - Drugstore Scene
- From Harvard's Theatre Collection
 - Clippings and reviews; programs

***Abbreviations for Readings:** See the appended bibliography for the full text of the citations abbreviated in weekly assignments.

OCTOBER 31 Viewing of Tim Robbins's *The Cradle Will Rock* 6:30-9:30, Room 3. Volunteer needed to retrieve film from Music Library.

NOVEMBER 1 *The Cradle Will Rock*
Class 2 — 1930s Progressivism and Agit-Prop Theater

Reading

Zuck, 201-220.

Tim Robbins, *Cradle Will Rock: The Movie and the Moment*, ix, 1-4.

David Schiff, "The Labor Pains of a Leftist Musical in an Angry Era," *New York Times*, December 5, 1999. Under "Clippings" on website.

Bruce Weber, "Questions Raised by a Political Period Piece," *New York Times*, August 29, 2000. Under "Clippings" on website.

Response Paper

Write a review of Robbins's film in relation to the original show (or, rather, what you know of it). How do the two interact? Does *Cradle Will Rock* (the musical) have potential ongoing resonance as agit-prop, or is it a period piece?

Class Presentations

Guidelines for the reports up ahead are much the same as for the first set of presentations. In other words, the framework will not change, but the expectations will increase for depth of content and crispness of presentation style.

15 minutes. No more.

A handout is needed, citing sources used and outlining main points discussed. If there are musical examples, they should also be included in the handout. Keep the handouts brief (1-3 pages per presentation). Either post the handout online before class or bring enough copies for everyone.

One of these presentations will be shaped into a written paper of approximately 8 pages (double-spaced), which is due on December 20th. You can choose which presentation to write up. More detailed guidelines for these papers will be discussed as the semester progresses.

- Recapture the moment in time when *Cradle Will Rock* received its premiere. What federal programs had been put into place for addressing the Depression? What was the mandate of the Federal Theatre Project? Where did Orson Welles stand in his career (see the clippings on the class website for him and his FTP production of *Macbeth*). Briefly compare *Cradle Will Rock* to *Pins and Needles* in terms of its main point and its theater style (see William Kozlenko's *The Best Short Plays of the Social Theatre*, which is on reserve).
- Bernstein produced *Cradle Will Rock* at Harvard in 1939. Explore the secondary literature about Bernstein and Blitzstein to get a sense of what (and who) was involved. To understand how the production was received, see the clippings from local papers that are posted on the class website. Then explore the local press more fully to evaluate the political climate in Boston and on campus at the time of this production.

Website Materials

- Clips from Tim Robbins's film, *The Cradle Will Rock*

- scene in Union Square, where Blitzstein sits at the piano and an image of Bertolt Brecht appears; this leads into performance of the theme song, “Joe Worker”
- rehearsal scene where Olive Stanton and Larry Foreman chat, with Gus and Sadie in the background
- From Harvard’s Theatre Collection
 - Clippings and programs related to *The Cradle Will Rock*
 - Materials connected with the Orson Welles’s production of *Macbeth* for the Federal Theatre Project
 - WPA Clippings

First self-evaluation is due. How do you feel you have contributed to the seminar? What has been the quality of that contribution? How might you improve? What are you gaining from the course so far? What else might you like to be tackling in here? What special issues might you have that I should know about (that is, in relation to the seminar)? 1-2 pages. Double-spaced. E-mail this to me by Monday morning.

NOVEMBER 7 Viewing of *Oklahoma!* 6:30-9:30, Room 3. Volunteer needed to retrieve film from Music Library

NOVEMBER 8 *Oklahoma!*
Class 1 — Learning the Show and Exploring its Cultural Spheres

Reading

Swain: 73-95

Stempel, Larry. "The Musical Play Expands." *American Music* 10/2 (Summer 1992): 136-69. Online: Proquest

Oklahoma!, Program book for the show's debut. On class website.

Listening

"*Oklahoma!* Original New York Production," original cast album. Focus on bands 1-10 (up to the Dream Ballet), and read the very brief liner notes. Score and libretto also on reserve. I suggest reading through the libretto before you pop the CD into the player.

Website Materials

- Audio clips and corresponding sheet music
 - "Oh What a Beautiful Morning"
 - "Kansas City"
 - "I Cain't Say No"
 - "People Will Say We're in Love"
- From Harvard's Theatre Collection
 - Clippings and programs
 - Photos of Theatre Guild Production in 1943

Response Paper

Read carefully—and critically—the program book for the premiere of *Oklahoma!* How was the work being packaged and its reception shaped? Choose an aspect or two that captures your imagination.

Class Discussion

Our focus in class will be on discussing musical style and critical reception. With the music, spend some time with both "I Cain't Say No" and "People Will Say We're in Love." Think of ways to articulate distinctive aspects of their compositional style. How does it compare to the two shows we have discussed previously?

In-Class Performances

- "I Cain't Say No"
- "People Will Say We're in Love"

Class Presentation

- Our class website includes a batch of newspaper clippings for *Oklahoma!*. Read through them, and offer an analysis of the work's reception. How was it viewed in terms of its historical position and musical style? Then compare this, in a general way, to Swain's perspective. How much is he continuing that perspective? Or not? This is a question that fuses reception history with historiography.

NOVEMBER 15 *Oklahoma!*
Class 2 — Analyzing Dance, Exploring Ethnicity

Reading

Most: 101-118

Listening

Finish listening to the original cast CD. As above, follow the libretto and score.

Response Paper

Offer a critique of Andrea Most's approach to *Oklahoma!* What is her main point? How does she support it? What questions does her argument raise? In short, do you buy this interpretation? Why or why not?

Class Presentations

- “The Dream Ballet”: What techniques are used to evoke a dream? Use the sequence in the film as a basis for your discussion. Where did Agnes DeMille stand in her career? How were standard distinctions in cultural hierarchy being breached?
- Not every character in this show is an American of European descent. Consider the one who represents an ethnic “other”—that is, Judd—and explore how he is depicted. Offer an analysis of “Lonely Room” in light of this psycho-sociological profile. Use the characterization of Judd in the movie as a basis

In-Class Performances

- “Lonely Room”
- “Oh What a Beautiful Morning”

Website Materials

- Film Clips
 - Dream Ballet + Opening “Oh What a Beautiful Morning”
- Audio clips and corresponding sheet music
 - Judd’s “Lonely Room”

NOVEMBER 21 Viewing of *South Pacific*. 6:30-9:30, Room 3.
Volunteer needed to retrieve film from Music Library

NOVEMBER 22 *South Pacific:*
Class 1 — Race and Representation

Reading

Most: 153-182.

Beidler, Philip D. "A *South Pacific* and American Remembering, or, >Josh, We=re Going to Buy This Son of a Bitch.=@ *Journal of American Studies* 65 (Winter 1993): 207-22. JSTOR

Hammerstein, Oscar, 2nd. *South Pacific* [Libretto]. New York: Random House, 1949.

Listening

Rodgers, Richard. *South Pacific* [Recording]. Reissue of original cast album from 1949. ----- *South Pacific* [Piano-Vocal Score].

Response Paper: This week's topic is writer's choice. Respond to one of the readings. Riff on Hammerstein's prose style. Analyze a tune from the show. Share your reactions to the film. Whatever.

Class Discussion: This is the first time you have been assigned a complete libretto for a show. Read through it carefully, and jot down observations as you go—about the use of language, the dramatic pacing, the style of the song lyrics, etc. Come to class with some thoughts about how one approaches such a document. Sure, you can read it for pleasure. But if we want to discuss Hammerstein's style—as we have for theater composers—where do we start, and what should we focus on?

After you've scoped out the big frame for analytic discussion of the text, then zero in on the lyrics and musical style of "You've Got to be Carefully Taught." What stereotypes were being exploited? What did Rodgers and/or Hammerstein have to say about this particular song—or about general issues of racial representation in their shows? To answer this last question, you will need to sniff around materials in the library. See what you can find.

Website Materials

- Audio clips and corresponding sheet music
 - You=ve Got to Be Carefully Taught
 - Younger than Springtime
 - Bali Ha'i
 - Some Enchanted Evening
 - I'm Gonna Wash that Man Right Out of my Hair
- From Harvard's Theatre Collection
 - Clippings and photos from premiere production

In-Class Performances

- You=ve Got to Be Carefully Taught
- Bali Ha'i

Class Presentation

- Assess the reception of *South Pacific* (original stage production) in terms of its engagement with racial issues. Look at the *New York Times*. Also go to clipping files on our class website and in the Theatre Collection. Search other newspapers of the day. Was race addressed? If so, in what way? Be alert to silences. Additionally, give us a sense of the status of Civil Rights efforts in the U.S. at the time of *South Pacific*. Focus especially on the Asian-American scene then. This was not so long after many Japanese-Americans had been confined in internment camps.

NOVEMBER 29 ***South Pacific***
Class 2 — Post-War American Politics

Readings

McConachie, Bruce, "The 'Oriental' Musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein and the U. S. War in Southeast Asia." *Theatre Journal* 46/3 (October 1994): 385-99. JSTOR

Garrett, Charles, "Chinatown, Whose Chinatown? Defining America's Borders with Musical Orientalism," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 57/1 (Spring 2004): 119-173. (hard copy on reserve in the Music Library; this article is too recent to be on JSTOR)

Response Paper

The material in Charles Garrett's article might seem far removed from *South Pacific*, yet it has a strong resonance in understanding that show. Link the two.

Class Discussion

Be prepared to discuss Bruce McConachie's article. What is his main point? How does he support it? Do you agree – or not? Amy: please lead off the discussion of this essay.

Class Presentations

- Choose Stephen Sondheim's *Pacific Overtures* or Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Flower Drum Song* to explore another musical about U.S.-Pacific relations (or simply representing Asia. Compare the political stance of your chosen show to *South Pacific*, as well as discussing its attempt at addressing racialisms. Bring in relevant musical examples and scores (if possible). Also compare reception of that work to *South Pacific* in terms of attention to race.
- Contextualize the season in which *South Pacific* appeared on Broadway—that is, the 1948-49 season. What were some of the other main shows that year? How did they compare to *South Pacific* in multiple parameters—musical style, politics, longevity? Turn to Richard Norton's *Chronology of American Musical Theater* as a starting point; also search the *New York Times* for contemporaneous critical assessments (i.e. overviews) of that season.

Website Materials

- From Harvard's Theatre Collection:
 - photos and reviews of *South Pacific*
 - similar materials for *Pacific Overtures* and *Flower Drum Song*
- Sheet music for *Ching a ling a loo* (American Memory Project, Library of Congress)

In-Class Performances

- Younger than Springtime
- I'm Gonna Wash that Man Right Out of My Hair

DECEMBER 6 *Big River: Anatomy of a Present-Day Musical*

On December 6th, we will meet in the Davison Room, which is on the 2nd floor of the Music Library.

Reading

Clippings on website. Read them all. (CD is on reserve in the Music Library)

Listening

Original Cast Album; on reserve. Listen to the whole thing. Read the liner notes.

Response Papers

Choose one of the topics below (we will decide who writes about what in class):

-- Characterize the ethos evoked by this show. What vision of America does it project? What musical means are used to achieve this? Is Twain approached critically? Reverentially? Slightly?

-- Anyone know *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* well enough to compare the novel to the libretto (which in this case will need to mean the story synopsis, as given in the linter notes)? How well has the novel been served? Or isn't that the right question? Maybe it should be: how much of an integrity does the libretto have on its own?

-- Writer's choice.

Preparation for Class Discussion

How does this show connect—if at all—to the canon of the American musical, as we have been studying it? And what's your personal experience with this show? Did you know it before class?

Website Materials

- From Harvard's Theatre Collection: Clippings

Class Presentation

Contextualize the surrounding artistic climate in which *Big River* appeared. What other major musicals premiered that year—or in the several years previous to it? Do any of these works share stylistic traits? Thematic content? Political (or apolitical) thrusts? OR explore the demographics of the country-music audience at the time of *Big River's* premiere. How did the musical style of this show connect to Broadway?

Seeing the Show

The seminar will be going to see *Big River* at the Turtle Lane Playhouse in Newton on Sunday, December 11, at 2 p.m.

Address of Theater: 283 Melrose Street, Newton. Phone: 617.244.0169

DECEMBER 12 **Viewing of *West Side Story*.** 6:30-9:30, Room 3.
Volunteer needed to retrieve film from Music Library

DECEMBER 13 ***West Side Story***
Class 1 — Learning the Show and Exploring its
Cultural Spheres

Reading

Block, 245-73.

Bernstein, "The Making of *West Side Story*," in *Readings on West Side Story*: 38-65.

Bernstein, "Excerpts from a *West Side Story* Log," in *Ibid*: 43-45.

Listening

West Side Story, original cast album. Listen to all. Follow the score and libretto on reserve in the music library.

Response Paper

The musical style of *West Side Story* is in many ways far removed from the world of Rodgers and Hammerstein. Or is it? Muse about the similarities and differences.

Class Presentations

- Bernstein's ensembles were distinctively perched on the border between opera and musical theater. Analyze the "Tonight" ensemble (Scene 8) for its musical and dramatic shaping.

- Chart the initial reception of *West Side Story*. What themes or issues were raised? Did critics perceive the work as distinctive? Successful? See our class website, as well as the section "Critics' Reviews of *West Side Story*" in *Readings on West Side Story*: 110-140. Also search the *New York Times* for the initial review and subsequent review-essays (that is, within five years of the premiere).

In-Class Performances

- "Tonight" (solo)
- "Somewhere"

Website Materials

- Audio Clips (and piano-vocal scores)
 - "Tonight" ensemble (Act 1, Scene 8)
 - "Maria's Bedroom" (Act II, Scene 1, from I Feel Pretty through Somewhere and Procession & Nightmare)
- Video Clips of same excerpts
- From Harvard's Theatre Collection
 - Clippings from premiere production
 - Clippings and photos from the film
 - Photos

DECEMBER 20 *West Side Story*
Class 2 — Ethnic Coding

Reading

Read the entire section titled “The Social and Cultural Ramifications of *West Side Story*,” in *Readings on West Side Story*, 142-162.

Alberto Sandoval-Sánchez, “A Puerto Rican Reading of the America of *West Side Story*,” in *José, Can You See?: Latinos on and Off Broadway*, 62-82.

Elizabeth Wells, “West Side Story and the Hispanic,” in *Echo* 2/1
www.echo.ucla.edu/Volume2-Issue1/table-of-contents21

Frances Négron-Muntaner, “Feeling Pretty: *West Side Story* and Puerto Rican Identity Discourses,” *Social Text* 18.2 (2000): 83-106. JSTOR

Response Paper

What are your personal feelings about the ethnic resonances of *West Side Story*? A few years ago a high school in western Massachusetts canceled a production of the show because of protests by Hispanic students. How viable is this show in today’s ethnically aware America?

Class Presentations

- Analyze the ethnic coding in “America.” What musical stereotypes are drawn upon to establish this tune as Hispanic? In a broader sense, what exactly does it mean to be “Hispanic” within the context of this score—that is, what particular musical techniques are drawn upon to achieve ethnic representation?
- Explore the role of dance in shaping the drama, focusing on the opening scene in the gym. Use the film clip on our website as the basis for your analysis. Read the secondary literature about Jerome Robbins.

Website Materials

- Audio clips (and corresponding piano-vocal scores):
 - “The Gym” (dance) (Act 1, Scene 4)
 - “America” (Act 1, Scene 5)
- Video clips of the same excerpts
- Materials from the Theatre Collection:
 - Clippings, etc.

In-Class Performance

- “Amerika”
- “I Feel Pretty”

FINAL PAPERS ARE DUE
