CELEBRITY & THE BROADWAY MUSICAL: PERCEPTIONS, PRACTICES, & PROSPECTS FOR AN AMERICAN ART FORM

Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for The Degree Master of Arts in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By
Nicole M. Grothues, B. S.
Graduate Program in Arts Policy & Administration

The Ohio State University
2011

Thesis Committee:
Wayne P. Lawson, Ph. D., Advisor
James J. Bohr, M. F. A.
ABSTRACT

Since the birth of Broadway in the late 19th and early 20th century, musical theatre has become a special part of America’s indigenous cultural heritage and cultural exportation. Broadway has long created its own headliners who made their living performing on stage in front of live audiences night after night and who were lauded for their theatrical prowess. However, beginning in the early 1980s, celebrities most famous for their work in other entertainment media (such as the television, film, and music industries) began to appear on Broadway—both on stage and off—in an effort to capitalize on the celebrities’ popular appeal and boost ticket sales. This capitalization on popular celebrity in Broadway musicals has steadily increased since the 1980s, and other uses of celebrity culture, such as adapting popular music and popular films, have also become ubiquitous in the Broadway musical. Through the voices of professionals in the musical theatre industry, this thesis explores how the current trend of Broadway musicals’ use of celebrity is affecting the art form of the American musical as an indigenous art form. The methodological approach used is discourse analysis, and 21 professionals in the field were interviewed in an effort to understand the qualitative repercussions of this financially motivated trend. The findings show that participants see the field as being affected both positively and negatively by celebrity on Broadway, and conclusions are made about which effects are most foretelling of what the future could hold for the American musical.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I must thank Mr. Lawrence Barnett. Your incredible generosity to The Ohio State University’s Arts Policy and Administration Program within the Department of Education made my pursuit of a master’s degree a financial reality.

I am eternally grateful to my Advisor, Dr. Wayne P. Lawson, for his seemingly endless well of knowledge and experience, which guided this project and my entire academic career at Ohio State.

I am indebted to Program Director Dr. Margaret J. Wyszomirski, who unexpectedly took on the role of my data collection Principal Investigator on short notice and whose always-thoughtful comments helped to clarify and refine this research in its early stages.

Thank you to James J. Bohr, who graciously cast me in an Ohio State Theatre Department production and then took on the commitment of serving on this thesis Committee. Your practical experience and knowledge of the Broadway theatre community proved an invaluable contribution to this project.

I would be remiss if I did not include Dr. Candace J. Stout in the list of Ohio State professors that influenced this research. The two research courses I
took with you during my time at Ohio State provided the much-needed focus and confidence to complete this report.

This thesis would not have been possible without my many research participants who generously shared their words of wisdom; thank you to Ann Arvia, Jen Bender, M. Jason Blaine, Jed Cohen, Lauren “Coco” Cohn, Eddie Curry, Zak Edwards, Leo Ash Evens, Stephen Flaherty, Brian Golub, Travis Greisler, Brad Haak, Hilary Hamilton, Justin Huff (with special thanks for referrals), Jack Lane, Matt Leisy, David Nehls, Tom O’Connor, Jessica Redish, and Erica Lynn Schwartz. Sloan Grenz is owed extra special thanks for not only his participation but also his highly detailed proofreading of this document. Collectively, your expertise, observations, opinions, and dreams for the future informed not only this research but inspired me personally.

I must also thank some of the greatest teachers I have had during my time at Ohio State: my classmates and friends. Thank you to Caitlin, Verónica, Liz, Sarah, Mini, Brea, Jerome, Angela, and InSul. Your varied backgrounds, interests, and perspectives kept me thinking and questioning, and your friendships kept me sane.

Finally, I would like to thank my friend-family—especially Scott, Joseph, and Kate—and my actual family: Charlene, Tom, Yvonne, and Caroline. Without your unconditional and undying support and encouragement, I would not have had the determination to complete a master’s program, nor the courage to pursue the career about which I am most passionate. I love you all, and I hope I that I will someday be able to repay the innumerable favors.
VITA

September 4, 1981 .......... Born, Omaha, Nebraska

May 1999 ..................... Diploma, Millard South High School

                           Omaha, Nebraska

June 2003 .................... B.S., Communication (Theatre); Music Theatre Certificate
                           Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois

2003–2009 ................... Professional Actor; Member Actors Equity Association
                           New York, New York & Nationwide

2004–2006 .................... Supervisor, Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola, Jazz at Lincoln Center
                           New York, New York

2008–2009 .................... Event Planner, Great Performances/Ronnie Davis Productions
                           New York, New York

2009–2011 .................... Barnett Fellow, The Ohio State University
                           Columbus, Ohio

2009–2011 .................... Coordinator, Barnett Symposium on the Arts & Public Policy
                           Columbus, Ohio

Summer 2010 .................. Marketing Intern, Roundabout Theatre Company
                           New York, New York

Field of Study

Major Field: Arts Policy & Administration
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ......................................................................................................................... ii

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................ ii

Vita ................................................................................................................................. iii

List of Figures ................................................................................................................ viii

Chapter 1: Introduction .................................................................................................. 1
  Statement of Purpose ................................................................................................. 1
  Historical Background .............................................................................................. 2
  The Stance of the Researcher ................................................................................ 5
  Research Questions ................................................................................................. 7
  Definition of Terms ................................................................................................. 7
  Scope & Limitations of the Study ........................................................................ 10
  Significance of the Study ...................................................................................... 11

Chapter 2: Literature Review ....................................................................................... 15
  Structure .................................................................................................................. 15
  Musical Theatre’s Social History ......................................................................... 16
  American Art Meets American Business .......................................................... 30
  Entertainment Media & Celebrity Culture ......................................................... 45
  Summary & Conclusion ....................................................................................... 56
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1: *The Lion King* in Tokyo, Japan ................................................................. 13

Figure 2.1: *The Phantom of the Opera* Logo, Majestic Theatre Marquee .................. 36

Figure 2.2: Snapple Theater Center, Times Square ......................................................... 39

Figure 2.3: March 4, 2000 *New York Times* Cartoon Regarding the Newly

Named American Airlines Theatre .................................................................................. 42

Figure 4.1: *Rock of Ages*, Brooks Atkinson Theatre ..................................................... 67

Figure 4.2: *The Addams Family*, Lunt-Fontanne Theatre ............................................. 69

Figure 4.3: Corbin Bleu in *In the Heights*, Richard Rodgers Theatre ......................... 84

Figure 4.4: Catherine Zeta-Jones in *A Little Night Music*, Walter Kerr Theatre .......... 86

Figure 4.5: Elton John’s *Billy Elliot*, Imperial Theatre ............................................... 88

Figure 4.6: Sean Hayes & Kristin Chenoweth in *Promises, Promises*, Broadway

Theatre ......................................................................................................................... 98

Figure 4.7: *The Producers* Playbill ................................................................................ 100

Figure 4.8: Wanda Sykes in *Annie*, Media Theatre ....................................................... 103

Figure 4.9: Shubert Alley Posters, 1957 ....................................................................... 106

Figure 4.10: Shubert Alley Posters, 2010 ..................................................................... 106

Figure 5.1: Times Square, 47th Street & Broadway ....................................................... 111

Figure 5.2: Developing the Commercial Creative Product ............................................ 117

Figure 5.3: Developing the Not-for-profit Creative Product ........................................ 117
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Statement of Purpose

It's all about popular!
It's not about aptitude.
It's the way you're viewed.
So it's very shrewd to be,
   Very, very popular,
   Like me!¹

The above quote is a lyric from the hit Broadway musical Wicked² and reflects the lead character Glinda’s attitude about the importance of popularity for success. Glinda sings these lyrics eight times a week at Broadway’s George Gershwin Theatre, and a quick stroll through New York City’s Times Square and Theatre District reveals that her theatre-producing neighbors share her commitment to all that is popular. Their formula for success is a mixture of part musical, part popular celebrity.

While young Glinda is not concerned with the implications of her obsession with popularity (she is, after all, a fictional character), it might be valuable for the very real Broadway community to reflect on this practice.

¹ Source: www.allmusicals.com
² Wicked, with music and lyrics by Stephen Schwartz, opened in October 2003 and continues to be one of the best-selling musicals on Broadway. The book is by Winnie Holzman, and the story is based on the novel Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West by Gregory Maguire. It is a parallel story of the 1939 film The Wizard of Oz, which was based on L. Frank Baum’s story The Wonderful Wizard of Oz.
Therefore, the purpose of this research is to analyze and understand the current state and the potential future of the indigenous art form of the American musical, specifically in regards to the recent trend of capitalizing on popular celebrity in Broadway musicals.

Historical Background

Musical theatre is a young and distinctly American art form, with the very first presentation of what would today be called a musical being the 1866 production of *The Black Crook* in New York City (Green & Green, 1996). Since that time, New York City and Broadway have remained the focal point of musical theatre production, a movement that can be traced via the history of American industrial development.

Prior to the middle of the 19th century, artists controlled the business of the arts throughout the United States. For example, the leading player of a theatre company would take on the theatre manager role, or a leading musician would organize opera and musical events. Inexpensive rent made it possible to cover the cost of a modest theatre from the ticket sales of a single week’s performances. There were no commissions and no risks of copyright infringements, and artists provided their own wigs, costumes, and makeup (Langley & Abruzzo, 1990). But the way that America conducted business—and therefore the business of theatre—changed significantly in 1849.

The Gold Rush of 1849 created incredible railway expansion, linking all the major cities of the country by 1870. The growth of this modern transportation
meant that local arts companies became less important, since productions could now easily tour with full casts, scenery, and costumes in tow (Langley & Abruzzo, 1990). In 1879, one trade paper counted the number of travelling companies at 49, and by the turn of the century, the number had increased to over four hundred (Walden, 2008). New York City was the heart of the railway network and thus became the city to which actors and vaudevillians flocked, leading to the almost total decline of geographically disperse resident theatre companies in the United States (Langley & Abruzzo, 1990).

A new breed of arts manager emerged in New York City: booking agents and businessmen who saw the opportunity to make a significant profit from these ubiquitous tours. Virtually all theatre productions began to be bankrolled by single producers, such as the infamous Florenz Ziegfeld with his Ziegfeld Follies (Langley & Abruzzo, 1990). In this way, the commercial Broadway show was born.

Since this inception, Broadway has long created its own headliners—performers like Ethel Merman and Tommy Tune—who made their living performing on stage in front of live audiences night after night and whose theatrical prowess attracted those audiences. However, beginning in the 1980s, celebrities most famous for their work in other entertainment media (such as the

---

3 Until the 1960s, when subsidized arts and tax-levied support for the arts appeared in the United States.
television, film, and music industries) began to be used as replacement actors\(^4\) in Broadway musicals as a marketing technique to boost ticket sales and extend the longevity of productions.\(^5\)

This capitalization on popular celebrity in the Broadway musical has steadily increased since the 1980s, with widespread proliferation since the 1994 Broadway revival\(^6\) of the musical *Grease!*, with its revolutionary “revolving-star” approach to casting (Collins, 1996, ¶ 10).\(^7\) A look at the official database for Broadway theatre information, the Internet Broadway Database (*ibdb.com*), shows that of the 16 Broadway musicals that opened during the 2009-2010 Broadway season,\(^8\) 12 contained some element of celebrity\(^9\)—not to mention the musicals that were open prior to that season and continued to run during that season. This is compared to three musicals that capitalized on celebrity of the 16 musicals that opened in the 1999-2000 season\(^10\) and one musical capitalizing on celebrity of the 12 musicals that opened in the 1989-1990 season\(^11\). In the words of one *Grease!* advertising executive, as quoted by Glenn Collins in a 1996 *New York Times* article, “"We want to institutionalize [Broadway musicals] as a New York tourist destination, right up there with the Empire State Building”” (¶ 8). The

---

\(^4\) For various reasons, actors often leave a long-running production, requiring a new actor to "replace" them in the role.

\(^5\) One early example is film star Raquel Welch’s stint in the musical *Woman of the Year* in 1981.

\(^6\) A “revival” is a restaging of a production after its original run has concluded. The material may or may not be revised.

\(^7\) Producers Barry and Fran Weissler used over a dozen popular celebrities as original cast members and replacement actors—from Rosie O’Donnell to Chubby Checker—during the course of the show’s run from 1994 to 1998.

\(^8\) May 25, 2009 – May 23, 2010, excluding concerts and special engagements.

\(^9\) As defined in the “Definition of Terms” section of this chapter.

\(^10\) May 31, 1999 – May 28, 2000, excluding concerts and special engagements.

pervasiveness of popular celebrity on Broadway stages is certainly attractive to tourists, and that executive would, no doubt, be pleased with the movement Broadway has made in this direction, for better or for worse, in the last 15 years.

The Stance of the Researcher

Because this research takes a qualitative approach, it is necessary to reveal the relevant biases that influenced the choice of research topic and the manner in which the research was conducted. In the simplest of terms, the author’s interest in this research topic is tied to a distinct personal connection to musical theatre, to Broadway, and to New York City.

From the time I was five years old and saw my first live theatrical event—my brother’s high school production of the musical Oliver!—I knew that musical theatre was the place I would forever call home. Musical theatre is what took me to Northwestern University for my undergraduate degree and then later to New York City to pursue dreams of a career as a Broadway actor. During my time in New York City, I experienced the life of a professional, union actor who worked consistently doing musical theatre both in New York City and regionally.

Today, I am studying theatre administration. I made this transition because I wanted a more stable and more lucrative living than is afforded to the “starving artist,” but I was not willing to silence my passion for the theatre. This desire for a more financially profitable career is also one of my biases in choosing to examine the commercial enterprise that is Broadway.

See “Chapter 3: Methodology.”
When I arrived at graduate school and began to consider potential thesis topics, I found myself thinking about the things that I had seen administrators do that made me angry as an actor. I frequently thought about what my actor friends complained about, without any real experience “on the other side of the table” to base their complaints upon. Then in December 2009, the various Broadway news websites announced that High School Musical\textsuperscript{13} star Corbin Bleu would be a replacement actor in the Tony Award-winning\textsuperscript{14} musical In the Heights for the Tony Award-winning composer and leading actor.\textsuperscript{15} Theatre friends’ Twitter feeds and Facebook status updates\textsuperscript{16} blew up with skeptical and, in some cases, downright nasty comments—from artists and administrators alike—about this casting choice. I knew that anything that inspired such a strong reaction and lively debate was worth looking into more deeply. In this way, the specificity of my thesis topic emerged.

In sum, while great attempts at objectivity will be made in exploring the research questions at hand, this research was inherently conducted and written through the lens of an aspiring theatre administrator with a lifelong passion for musical theatre and significant professional background as a theatre artist.

\textsuperscript{13} Disney’s highly successful made-for-television movie-musical, which was originally aired in 2006.
\textsuperscript{14} The Tony Award celebrates excellence in the theatre and is considered the highest honor that those working on Broadway can receive.
\textsuperscript{15} See Figure 4.3 in “Chapter 4: Research Findings & Analysis.”
\textsuperscript{16} Twitter and Facebook are popular social networking websites.
Research Questions

The specific questions to which this thesis is devoted are: How is the current trend of Broadway musicals’ use of celebrity changing the perceptions and practices of the American musical as an indigenous art form? And what might that mean for the prospects of the American musical moving forward?

Embedded within these large questions are many smaller questions: What are the motivations behind Broadway producers using celebrity? How are the other involved artists (performers, directors, writers, etc.) effected by the use of celebrity? How does celebrity on Broadway affect choices in regional musical theatre programming? Finally, what might these answers mean for the creation of new musicals?

Definition of Terms

The word “celebrity” means different things to different people. Moreover, those who are not well acquainted with the theatre industry may have a foggy conception of what “Broadway” theatre is, which could cause confusion in the reading of this report. Consequently, it is now necessary to clearly articulate the definitions of these terms, and others, as they are used in this research.

Celebrity

For the purposes of this thesis, the term “celebrity” is synonymous with people or material that are well known in popular culture media outside of theatre. For example, the casting of television, film, and music industry stars in Broadway musical roles is the most obvious instance of using celebrity and
occupies the majority of this paper’s discussion.\textsuperscript{17} It is important to note that the celebrity discussion is not concerned with whether or not these celebrities are "deserving" or "worthy" of Broadway; in some cases, popular culture celebrities actually began their careers on stage.\textsuperscript{18} Rather, the discussion is about Broadway’s exploitation of their current fame, since the typical Broadway tourist-theatergoer is not likely to be aware of these performers’ theatrical careers outside of their television, film, or music careers.

The discussion of the use of celebrity also encompasses when popularly famous people are associated with a Broadway musical via writing, producing, or directing.\textsuperscript{19} Moreover, celebrity is explored in terms of the use of existing, popular source material, such as adapting popular music and films into “new” Broadway musicals.\textsuperscript{20}

\textit{Broadway}

“Broadway” refers to theatrical performances presented in the 40 large professional theatres with 500 seats or more located in New York City’s Theatre District in the Times Square area, plus one theatre in Lincoln Center. They are

\textsuperscript{17} An example is recording artist Usher starring as Billy Flynn in the stage version of the musical \textit{Chicago} in 2006.
\textsuperscript{18} For example, Kelsey Grammer, an actor from the television series \textit{Cheers} and \textit{Frasier}, starred in the Broadway revival of the musical \textit{La Cage Aux Folles} but had a theatrical career before becoming popularly recognizable from television. Another example is candy pop princess Britney Spears, who appeared in the off-Broadway show \textit{Ruthless} in 1991 prior to becoming a pop icon.
\textsuperscript{19} A good example is popular musician Elton John writing the music for the currently running Broadway musical \textit{Billy Elliot} and talk show host Oprah Winfrey producing the \textit{The Color Purple, The Musical}, which was on Broadway from December 2005 to February 2008.
\textsuperscript{20} Currently running shows like \textit{Mama Mia} (which uses the music of '70s band ABBA) and \textit{The Addams Family} (which adapted the popular cartoon, television, and film characters onto stage) are examples.
called Broadway theatres after the famous avenue that runs through the center of New York City and Times Square.

The research concerns Broadway musicals only, not Broadway plays, although the celebrity trend is present there as well. In this report, however, any reference to Broadway should be understood to refer only to the musicals that appear there, unless specifically stated otherwise.

**Regional Theatre**

Regional theatres are permanent theatre companies that operate in a single community. In this report, the term is not used according to the theatre unions’ contractual definition, but as a blanket term to describe all non-Broadway professional theatres outside of New York City. Within this term are many other distinctions that could be made, such as children’s theatre, dinner theatre, etc., but a blanket term will be necessary to distinguish between Broadway, New York City theatre and other professional theatre.

**Professional Theatre**

A “professional” theatre is one that participates in collective bargaining agreements with the various unions that represent professional actors, directors, and designers. Non-union theatres and productions are not explicitly part of the discussion, although there are derivations that would implicitly include them.

---

21 The theatre unions are Actors Equity Association (AEA, for actors and stage managers), Stage Directors and Choreographers Society (SDC), and International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE, for designers and technicians).
Producer

In the theatre, “producer” refers to the chief executive(s) ultimately responsible for overseeing all aspects of mounting a theatrical production. Producers supervise all management and administrative tasks and are often primarily concerned with raising money for a production. In commercial theatre, the title of producer has come to sometimes be given to a person who is, in reality, an investor; that is, they can claim no say in the actual running of the production. The use of “producer” in this report should be understood as the former definition.

Scope & Limitations of the Study

While this report includes discussion of some Broadway musicals that used celebrity in the 1980s and 1990s, the emphasis is primarily on those produced since the year 2000 because of the explosion of this trend since that time. Moreover, this is a necessary narrowing of scope for manageability in this project, and this most recent period was deemed to be the most relevant in understanding the current state and the future of the American musical.

Additionally, this research report was constructed via the voices of professionals working in the field. It makes no explicit consideration for musical theatre audiences outside of that group.

Finally, this research was conducted with a pointed focus towards Broadway. By definition, this approach has some limitations in application to

---

22 Demonstrated in the figures from the previous “Historical Background” section.
musical theatre that happens outside of New York City. However, as the findings in this paper support, what happens in regional theatre has historically been inextricably entwined with much of what happens on Broadway. Therefore, this focus should not be seen as wholly limiting. The Executive Director of Theatre Communications Group, Teresa Eyring (2011), put it well when she described the interconnectedness of the theatre community in this way:

Theatre is a local art. It's audiences, craftspeople, ticket-takers and real estate are often of a particular place. What connects them and creates the reality of a national theatre landscape—and beyond that, a global theatre community—are the artists: the performers and designers and playwrights who travel from theatre to theatre; the scripts that are produced in more than one house, in more than one city, in more than one era. (p. 10)

That is to say, the people who work in the theatre often find themselves in a variety of settings—from Broadway to the tiniest of regional theatres—and this means that while geographically distinct, the various communities are not necessarily creatively distinct.

Significance of the Study

For those devout theatre scholars who might divert their gaze from the oft-considered “popular” art form of musicals, it is important to note that musical theatre is today’s most reflective descendent of the frequently revered theatre of ancient Greece and has also come to echo composer Richard Wagner’s 19th

---

23 See “Chapter 4: Research Findings & Analysis.”
24 Theatre Communications Group (TCG) is a national organization for the American theatre, offering its members networking and knowledge-building opportunities through conferences, events, research, and communications, among many other activities.
century ideas of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or “total work of art”: Musical theatre communicates character, emotional content, and plot through words, music, and movement as an integrated whole.

According to the National Endowment for the Arts’ (NEA) 2008 *Survey of Public Participation in the Arts* (2009), more Americans attended musicals than any of the other performing arts disciplines in 2008, with 16.7% having seen a musical within the prior 12 months. However, Americans’ participation in arts activities, in general, has diminished since 1992: Musical theatre attendance has been incrementally decreasing since even earlier and has declined overall by about two percent since 1982 (NEA, 2009). This decline is small compared to its counterpart and the second most popular performing arts discipline, non-musical plays, and musical theatre has had more consistent attendance in recent history: Non-musical plays experienced a 1.6% increase in participation from 1982 to 1992, but attendance has declined for non-musical plays by over four percent since 1992, with only 9.4% of Americans having seen a non-musical play within the previous 12 months when surveyed in 2008 (NEA, 2009).

Since the birth and expansion of the Broadway musical in America, the tradition of musical theatre has become a special commodity and cultural product, recognized and admired not just in the United States but also throughout the world (Green & Green, 1996), especially since the 1980s. As of 2010, there were at least 13 major Broadway-style productions running in Japan alone, such
as *The Lion King*\textsuperscript{25} (see the Tokyo poster below), which has grossed almost three times the amount it has on Broadway in international productions (Gamerman, 2010). *Beauty and the Beast*\textsuperscript{26} has had major productions in 18 countries worldwide since 1995, and despite its lack of success on Broadway, ten percent of the Dutch population saw the stage musical version of *Tarzan*\textsuperscript{27} during its two-year run in the Netherlands (Gamerman, 2010).

![The Lion King poster](Gamerman, 2010, Credit: Disney)

**Figure 1.1: The Lion King in Tokyo, Japan (from Gamerman, 2010, Credit: Disney)**

In 1996, sales of cultural products\textsuperscript{28} in a broad sense became the largest export of the U.S., and between 1977 and 1996, the U.S. culture industries grew

\textsuperscript{25} A stage adaptation of the 1994 Disney musical film of the same name.

\textsuperscript{26} A stage adaptation of the 1991 Disney musical film of the same name.

\textsuperscript{27} A stage adaptation of the 2006 Disney musical film of the same name. The Broadway production ran for only a year and three months, which was not enough to recoup the initial investment.

\textsuperscript{28} Cultural products include film, music, television, software, journals, books, and art objects.
three times as quickly as the overall economy (Miller, 2005), owed largely to the rise of information networks in the latter part of the 20th century (Singh, 2008). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) reported that seven percent of the worldwide gross domestic product was composed of the cultural and creative industries in 2002 (Singh, 2008). Cultural products, including musical theatre and the arts, are currently and will continue to be of growing importance in how the U. S. interacts with other nations in an increasingly global economic environment (Singh, 2008).

Together, all of these facts suggest that musical theatre is an important part of America’s indigenous cultural heritage, as well as its current and future economic growth. It is, therefore, a worthy subject of research and study.

The results of this research project could be of interest to a variety of academics and practitioners in theatre and other arts disciplines. Included in this list are arts administrators and arts administration educators, especially those concerned with producing, programming, marketing, and audience development in the theatre. Musical theatre artists (performers, directors, writers, etc.) and their educators could also benefit from a deeper understanding of how knowledge and practice is evolving within their industry. By exploring the use of popular celebrity on Broadway, this study sheds light on whether Glinda’s assertion, “It’s all about popular!” is well-heeded advice for the musical theatre industry.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Structure

To provide a further context for the study of the use of celebrity in Broadway musicals, it is necessary to put forth a review of the existing literature. The review that follows is “non-traditional” in both its content and its form, because the research topic at hand is one that has rarely been directly addressed in the past. Because of this fact, a traditional literature review would have been extraordinarily difficult and impractical.

Instead, three component areas of celebrity on Broadway have been identified to explore the environmental and historical context around the issue. A modified annotated bibliography format is used to present a review of these component areas, which are: 1) The social history of American musical theatre; 2) The business-arts intersection of Broadway and the blurring lines between commercial and not-for-profit theatre in America; and 3) American entertainment media and celebrity culture. Within each of these component areas, significant full-length books on the topics are reviewed, and a sampling of short publications

29 Literature reviews, generally, serve to distill oft-occurring themes from significant amounts of previous academic research in the same area of study, and to identify gaps or points of disagreement.
30 An annotated bibliography provides a summary and assessment of a piece of writing, as it is relevant to the researcher.
provide supplemental context. After each of the three component areas are reviewed, there is a brief discussion of the relationship between the component areas and how they provide an aggregate context for the use of celebrity on Broadway.

Musical Theatre’s Social History

*Our Musicals, Ourselves* by John Bush Jones

Jones' 2003 book is a full-scale history of the American musical, beginning in the late 1800s and concluding in 2001. The author traces not only musical theatre within history but also musical theatre as history, showing how the musicals of various eras were reflections of and influenced their social and political environments. Jones examines almost exclusively the theatre of New York City and Broadway musicals; yet, he does not call the book “Our Broadway Musicals, Ourselves,” just *Our Musicals, Ourselves*. Here again is support that Broadway is one of the most relevant places to look in any discussion of the past, the present, or the future of the American musical.

The author goes into incredible depth on the many social and political issues over time in this 400-plus-page book, as well as thoroughly discussing hundreds of musicals. A summary of all of these issues and musicals is not realistic or valuable for this literature review. Instead, only the major thematic points and those more subtle points that have particular resonance for this thesis are summarized below, and only the best-known musicals and writers that support these themes are cited.
Jones opens his book by briefly addressing the relatively small number of musicals that were presented in America in the late 19th century\textsuperscript{31}, but he most compellingly begins his social history in the early 20th century. At this time, Broadway musicals were almost purely diversionary in nature and reflected the flag-waving patriotism of the World War I era: “Generally speaking, wartime audiences went to musicals not to be reminded of but to forget their concerns” (p. 45).

One of the epitomizing musical theatre writers and performers of this time period and its patriotic spirit is George M. Cohan. Another musical theatre lyricist, Oscar Hammerstein II\textsuperscript{32} (as quoted in Jones) noted that: “[N]ever was a plant more indigenous to a particular part of the earth than was George M. Cohan to the United States of his day” (p. 22). Cohan’s positively upbeat patriotism was reflected in songs like “You’re a Grand Old Flag” from his 1906 musical George Washington, Jr., which was the first show tune\textsuperscript{33} to sell over a million copies of sheet music and continues to be a well known song of American patriotism today.

Along with World War I American patriotism came a xenophobic pride and feeling of superiority, according to Jones. Beginning in 1907, theatre impresario Florenz Ziegfeld, among others, capitalized on this atmosphere by cheerfully and

\textsuperscript{31} The British operetta imports of W. S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan, especially \textit{H.M.S. Pinafore}, are the most notable influences of this period on American musical theatre.

\textsuperscript{32} Best known for his collaboration with composer Richard Rodgers on such musicals as \textit{Oklahoma!}, \textit{Carousel}, \textit{The King and I}, and \textit{South Pacific}.

\textsuperscript{33} A show tune is a song that was originally part of the score of a musical, especially one that has become detached from the original context of the musical and has become popularly recognizable.
lavishly presenting patriotism and “the war in review” (p. 37). These musical reviews were spectacular for their time and contained patriotic tableaus that experimented with feminine nudity; in the context of a commitment to patriotism, no one dared question this kind of display. Ziegfeld’s various *Follies* quickly became some of the most financially successful musical productions of the era.

Importantly, the overseas hostilities of World War I meant that America was importing less and less theatre, opera, and operetta from Europe, as it had frequently done in the previous century. The doors for a distinctly American style of theatre were open, and musicals became the almost exclusive property of American librettists, lyricists, and composers. This era provided the early-career environment for such enduring American operetta and musical theatre writers as Sigmund Romberg, Irving Berlin, Cole Porter, George and Ira Gershwin, and Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart.

In the “roaring twenties,” the musical boomed. More musical productions opened on Broadway in the 1920s than at any other time in musical theatre’s history. The economic prosperity and heightened consumerism following World War I was reflected in the many “frivolous” musicals of the era. As Jones points

---

34 Many of these writers were actually European immigrants, but they were naturalized Americans, nonetheless.
35 Hungarian-born American composer best known for his operettas, such as *The Student Prince*, *The Desert Song*, and *The New Moon*.
36 Russian-born American composer and lyricist best known for his numerous hit songs, including “God Bless America,” “White Christmas,” “Alexander’s Ragtime Band,” and “Puttin’ on the Ritz.”
37 Composer and lyricist of such musicals as *Anything Goes* and *Kiss Me, Kate*.
38 Brothers and composer-lyricist team responsible for the opera *Porgy and Bess*.
39 Among Rodgers and Hart’s most notable collaborations are *Babes in Arms*, *The Boys from Syracuse*, and *Pal Joey*. Rodgers would later collaborate with Oscar Hammerstein II on many additional notable musicals.
out: “…[W]hat was significant and fascinating about 1920s America was its fascination with the insignificant” (p. 58). Americans had increased discretionary income and more leisure time, and they loved to see themselves at play on stage. Musicals, such as Good News⁴⁰, mirrored the audiences’ lifestyles and the good spirit of the time.

Nationally popular social dances of the period—namely the Charleston and the Black Bottom—became so because of their presentation in Broadway; choreographers had discovered these localized dances in the southern coastal regions of Savannah, Charleston, and New Orleans and transported them to the Broadway stage. Other dances were created specifically for Broadway and found their way into popular social culture as well, such as the Varsity Drag, which first appeared in the musical Good News.

In the midst of these lighthearted and popular productions, one of the most historically notable musicals of the era emerged: Show Boat. This 1927 musical by Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein II departed from the diversionary nature of other 1920s musicals and daringly (for that time period) addressed such issues as miscegenation, bigotry, and alcoholism. It included a mixed-race cast in which black performers played three-dimensional, sympathetic characters, as opposed to the stereotypical caricatures that were previously seen on

---

⁴⁰ This 1927 musical—with a book by Laurence Schwab and B. G. DeSylva, lyrics by DeSylva and Lew Brown, and music by Ray Henderson—follows pure and lighthearted plots around love and football heroes on a fictional college campus.
Broadway.\textsuperscript{41} This musical was not just entertainment, but “entertainment with a mission” (p. 73). \textit{Show Boat} is also considered the first successful “integrated musical”—a musical in which all of the elements (dialogue, lyrics, music, and movement) grow from a central theme and contribute to a unified development of characters and telling of a story\textsuperscript{42)—a concept that would become the foundation for the later “golden age”\textsuperscript{43} of American musical theatre.

In many ways, \textit{Show Boat} has a similar quality to the musicals of the next important era, that of the Depression. Given the troubled economic, social, and political climate of America during the Depression, the musicals of this era often dealt with more “serious” issues, such as economic hardship and politics. Marc Blitzstein’s now infamous 1937 musical, \textit{Cradle Will Rock}, is the musical theatre epitome of this climate and the theatre’s response to it.\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{41} Well into the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, show business contributed to reinforcing stereotypes of black Americans, which had its foundation in a different and earlier indigenous American theatrical form: the minstrel show. From the 1840s to the 1890s, white men with their faces painted black (“blackface”), black men, and even black men in blackface presented stage personae of grotesque caricatures of black racial identity. This was often the only interaction white audiences had with “black culture,” and it satisfied their curiosity and reinforced their prejudices about blacks. The prevalence of the minstrel show declined in the late 1800s and was replaced with revue and vaudeville-type material for black performers that was broader in scope of material and tone and provided more opportunity for the authentic talents of black performers to be presented. However, the previously contrived stereotypes of blacks created by minstrel shows could not help but persist for many decades.

\textsuperscript{42} Similar to Wagner’s idea of \textit{Gesamtkunstwerk} mentioned in “Chapter 1: Introduction.” The integrated musical is also sometimes referred to as the “book musical.”

\textsuperscript{43} The 1940s and 1950s are considered the “golden age” of the musical in America, and this time period is discussed further below.

\textsuperscript{44} The plot of \textit{Cradle Will Rock} is an allegory for corruption and corporate greed. Due to the subject matter and the fact that the project was funded by the Federal Theatre Project (a New Deal project sponsored by the Works Progress Administration), the original full-scale production was shut down. WPA officers threatened to arrest any actor appearing on stage in this production and would not allow the removal of any costumes or scenery, as they were “government property.” The cast, production team, and opening night ticket-holders quickly moved to another theatre without the scenery, costumes, or even an orchestra. With only a piano, composer Blitzstein took the stage to presumably sing, play, and read the musical as a solo for the
Americans’ taste for lavish reviews waned in the Depression, and the final *Ziegfeld Follies* that would bear Ziegfeld’s personal touch was presented in 1931. Money was tight, and the success of “talking pictures” decreased the number of shows produced on Broadway, with many artists leaving New York City to head west to California. This decrease in financial and artistic resources caused the closing of two-thirds of the Broadway theatres by 1931, a blow from which Broadway has never fully recovered. Outside of New York City, moreover, there were only 32 legitimate, professional theatres operating across the entire country by 1932 (Langley & Abruzzo, 1990).

Jones points out that if there is any significant positive result of the Depression’s effect on the American musical, it is the doors that were opened for black artists during this time. Musicals featuring black performers were the least expensive to produce, because such productions generally focused on the talents of the artists and not on elaborate physical production. Blacks artists were, furthermore, willing to work for lower wages than their white counterparts: “…[T]here were more African Americans working in New York theatre in the mid-1930s than at any time before. And perhaps more to the point, they were working in plays and musicals that did not convey stereotyped images of black” (p. 85). This is the environment in which the artistically daring opera featuring an entire audience. However, members of the cast sang their parts from their seats in the audience (which did not violate the government’s prohibition for them to appear on stage), solidifying the musical’s now legendary status.
cast of classically trained black singers, George and Ira Gershwin’s *Porgy and Bess*\textsuperscript{45}, was presented.

Despite the “seriousness” of the Depression era, Broadway audiences were still drawn to “fluffy” musicals, a characteristic that has never totally separated itself from musical theatre. However, the diversionary musicals of this era now displayed their frivolity coupled with satire: “...[P]eriods of societal turmoil and discontent provide far more material for satiric comedy than... the complacency of Coolidge/Hoover prosperity” (p. 90). For the first time, the actual President of the United States (Franklin Delano Roosevelt) was parodied on stage in Rodgers and Hart’s *I’d Rather Be Right*\textsuperscript{46}. George and Ira Gershwin’s *Strike Up the Band*\textsuperscript{47} and *Of Thee I Sing*\textsuperscript{48} are two more examples of this kind of satirical Depression era musical.

World War II was the next distinct social era for musical theatre. Wartime demand for every employable American created record low unemployment rates, and these new jobs and salaries meant that Americans (including women this time) had leisure time and money to spend. The number of musicals produced

\textsuperscript{45} The librettist and co-lyricist of this 1935 opera was DuBose Heyward, who wrote the novel *Porgy* on which the opera was based.

\textsuperscript{46} This musical, with a book by Moss Hart (no relation to Lorenz Hart) and George S. Kaufman, centers on a woman and her boyfriend, who needs a raise in order for them to get married. The President steps in and solves their dilemma.

\textsuperscript{47} This musical, with a book by Morrie Ryskind, centers on a chocolate tycoon who tries to maintain his monopoly on the American market by convincing the United States government to declare war on Switzerland.

\textsuperscript{48} This musical, with a book by George S. Kaufman and Morrie Ryskind, concerns a man who runs for President of the United States on the "love" platform. A beautiful pageant winner is selected for his future First Lady, but he falls in love with a sensible woman instead, finding himself in political hot water. *Of Thee I Sing* was the first musical to win the Pulitzer Prize for Drama.
during this period did not increase from the Depression era, but attendance and revenue did.

Unlike during World War I, however, Broadway mostly avoided the war for its source material: “In the world of entertainment... about the only place Americans could turn without constant reminders of the war was the musical theatre” (p. 129). However, in the war-saturated climate, songwriters like Irving Berlin, Frank Loesser, Jule Styne, Johnny Mercer, and Fats Waller were called upon to unite the country in the writing of war songs in addition to writing musicals.\textsuperscript{49}

The World War II era also shepherded what Jones calls “the Rodgers and Hammerstein Revolution” (p. 140): “[Richard] Rodgers and [Oscar] Hammerstein [II] demonstrated that musicals could be ‘idea-bearing,’ socially conscious, and socially responsible, yet still entertain audiences and make money” (p. 141). Hence, the golden age of musical theatre arrived. Rodgers and Hammerstein’s first musical, \textit{Oklahoma!}\textsuperscript{50}, built upon the integrated musical concept begun in \textit{Show Boat} 15 years earlier, using songs that were not superfluous but that developed character and story by driving the action forward. The social themes established in \textit{Oklahoma!}—the need for eradicating prejudices, promoting tolerance, and bringing about reconciliation—became

\textsuperscript{49} Such as Berlin’s “Any Bonds Today?”, Loesser’s “Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition,” Styne’s “Vict’ry Polka,” Mercer’s “G.I. Jive,” and Waller’s “When the Nylons Bloom Again.”

\textsuperscript{50} This 1943 musical is based on the play \textit{Green Grow the Lilacs} by Lynn Riggs. It is set in 1906 Oklahoma Territory and tells the story of cowboy-farm girl romances.
mainstays of Rodgers and Hammerstein’s work and appear in many of their successful later musicals as well.\textsuperscript{51}

Following World War II, the nation continued on the path of prosperity begun during the war. Jones says that abundance, coupled with the Cold War fear of nuclear attacks and a communist threat to the nation, fostered an attitude of materialistic complacency and a desire for isolation. This environment is reflected upon in three significant types of musicals of the era—those that dealt with utopian themes, those that dealt with race and “foreigner” relations, and those that assaulted middle-class materialism. Musicals of isolated utopia and its inevitable expiration included \textit{Brigadoon}\textsuperscript{52}, \textit{Camelot}\textsuperscript{53}, and \textit{The Fantasticks}\textsuperscript{54}. \textit{Finian’s Rainbow}\textsuperscript{55}, \textit{South Pacific}\textsuperscript{56}, and \textit{West Side Story}\textsuperscript{57} dealt with race relations and bigotry. Frank Loesser’s \textit{Guys & Dolls}\textsuperscript{58} and \textit{How to Succeed in

\textsuperscript{51} Including \textit{Carousel}, \textit{South Pacific}, \textit{The King and I}, \textit{Pipe Dream}, \textit{Flower Drum Song}, and \textit{The Sound of Music}.

\textsuperscript{52} A 1947 musical with book and lyrics by Alan Jay Lerner and music by Frederick Loewe, which tells the story of a Scottish village that appears for one day every hundred years, although the villagers experience each century as the passing of only one night.

\textsuperscript{53} A 1960 musical by Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe based on the King Arthur legend.

\textsuperscript{54} A 1960 musical with book and lyrics by Tom Jones and music by Harvey Schmidt, which tells the allegorical story of two neighboring fathers who trick their children into falling in love. The musical is based on the play \textit{The Romancers} by Edmond Rostand.

\textsuperscript{55} A 1947 musical with book by E. Y. Harburg and Fred Saidy, lyrics by Harburg, and music by Burton Lane. The plot centers on a man and his daughter who move to the southern United States from Ireland to bury a stolen pot of gold. Complications arise when a bigoted and corrupt U.S. Senator gets involved.

\textsuperscript{56} A 1949 Rodgers and Hammerstein musical, with book by Hammerstein and Joshua Logan. The story draws upon stories from James A. Michener’s \textit{Tales of the South Pacific}. The musical won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama.

\textsuperscript{57} A 1957 musical with book by Arthur Laurents, music by Leonard Bernstein, and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, which is a modern adaptation of William Shakespeare’s \textit{Romeo and Juliet}. Set in New York City in the mid-1950s, the musical explores a rivalry between the Jets and the Sharks, two teenage street gangs of different ethnic backgrounds.

\textsuperscript{58} A 1950 musical with book by Jo Swerling and Abe Burrows. The musical is based on short stories by Damon Runyon.
Business Without Really Trying<sup>59</sup> were largely diversionary in nature but also lampooned American suburbia and materialism.

Also notable is that from 1944 to 1960, the cost of producing a Broadway production exploded, with the price of tickets doubling during that period. Additionally, the proliferation of television<sup>60</sup> and the emergence of rock and roll greatly changed Americans' entertainment habits, keeping people at home and changing the musical tastes of young people. This is the time period often cited as the moment when musical theatre and popular culture began to sever ties.

Many of the memorable Broadway musicals of the 1960s and early 1970s were “issue-driven musicals of the turbulent years” (p. 235). Of course, the good-time musicals that have always characterized musical theatre existed, but the divisiveness, social protest, and social change of the time found its way onto the Broadway stage. Jones defines an “issue-driven” musical as “any musical in which a social or political agenda shares center stage with plot and is absolutely inseparable from the story…” (p. 237). Exemplars of this genre include Man of La Mancha<sup>61</sup>, Cabaret<sup>62</sup>, and Hair<sup>63</sup>. Moreover, diversity began to appear on stage

---

<sup>59</sup> A 1961 musical with book by Abe Burrows, Jack Weinstock, and Willie Gilbert. The musical is based on Shepherd Mead’s book of the same name.

<sup>60</sup> See the “American Art Meets American Business” section below for a more in-depth discussion of television’s effect on American culture.

<sup>61</sup> A 1965 musical with a book by Dale Wasserman, lyrics by Joe Darion, and music by Mitch Leigh, inspired by Miguel de Cervantes' Don Quixote. It tells the story of the “mad” knight, Don Quixote, performed by Cervantes and his fellow prisoners as he awaits a hearing with the Spanish Inquisition.

<sup>62</sup> A 1966 musical with a book by Joe Masteroff, music by John Kander, and lyrics by Fred Ebb. Cabaret is based on the novel Goodbye to Berlin by Christopher Isherwood. Set in 1931 Berlin as the Nazis are rising to power, it focuses on nightlife at the seedy Kit Kat Klub.
with “color-blind casting”\(^64\) in musicals like The Public Theatre’s\(^65\) *Two Gentleman of Verona*\(^66\).

The 1970s were also characterized by alienation and a “‘me’ mentality” that echoed the “fragmented society” of the time (p. 269). Many musicals could be described as splintered and inward turning, and these types of musicals eventually came to be called “fragmented musicals.” According to Jones, fragmented musicals intentionally disunite form and content and are often referred to as “non-plot musicals” or “concept musicals.” Illustrative examples of the fragmented musical of this time include *Company*\(^67\), *Godspell*\(^68\), and *A Chorus Line*\(^69\).

Jones describes the Broadway musicals of the mid-1970s, the 1980s, and the 1990s as reflecting nostalgia for the 1950s and using “recycled culture” (p. 63).

---

63 A 1967 musical with book and lyrics by James Rado and Gerome Ragni and music by Galt MacDermot. *Hair* tells the story of the “tribe,” a group of politically active hippies living a bohemian life in New York City and fighting against the Vietnam War.

64 Color-blind casting (also sometimes called non-traditional casting or integrated casting) is the practice of casting a role without considering the actor's ethnicity—for example, casting actors to play biological relatives who are not of the same race.

65 The Public Theatre in New York, New York was run by Joseph Papp from 1967 to 1991 and was noted for casting roles without regard to race (among many other things).

66 A 1971 musical with book by John Guare and Mel Shapiro, lyrics by Guare, and music by Galt MacDermot. *Two Gentlemen of Verona* was based on the William Shakespeare comedy of the same name, and it won the Tony Award for Best Musical.

67 A 1970 musical with a book by George Furth and music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim. *Company* is made up of short vignettes, presented in no particular chronological order, linked by a celebration for the lead character's 35th birthday.


69 A 1976 musical with a book by James Kirkwood, Jr. and Nicholas Dante, lyrics by Edward Kleban, and music by Marvin Hamlisch. *A Chorus Line* is set on the bare stage of a Broadway theatre during an audition for a musical and provides a glimpse into the personalities of the characters as they describe their lives and their decisions to become dancers. The musical won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama.
He quotes social historians Douglas Miller and Marion Nowak in his explanation of the social context of this trend:

“Periods of intense longing for an earlier era indicate that people are discontented with the present... For many people the 1950s came to symbolize a golden age of innocence and simplicity, an era supposedly unruffled by riots, racial violence, Vietnam, Watergate, assassinations.” (p. 305)

This nostalgia manifested on Broadway in an explosion of revivals of musicals from previous decades, especially those from the 1950s. Jones notes:

Some years produced so few new shows that the Tony Committee had to drop certain award categories or change the rules to reduce the number of nominees required in a category from four to three or even fewer. The committee also created the new category of Best Revival, so prevalent were recycled shows. (p. 309)

Notable revival examples include Peter Pan\textsuperscript{70} in 1979, My Fair Lady\textsuperscript{71} in 1980 and again in 1993, Damn Yankees\textsuperscript{72} in 1994, and the longest-running 1950s revival, Guys & Dolls, in 1992.

The new shows that were presented on Broadway during this period often drew upon a “manufactured nostalgia” (p. 312). For example, Little Shop of Horrors\textsuperscript{73} was written in the musical style of early 1960s rock and roll, doo-wop, and Motown. Another successful musical, Crazy for You\textsuperscript{74}, was a reworking of George and Ira Gershwin’s 1930 musical Girl Crazy with interpolations from other Gershwin works.

\textsuperscript{70} Originally produced in 1954.
\textsuperscript{71} Originally produced in 1956.
\textsuperscript{72} Originally produced in 1955.
\textsuperscript{73} A 1982 musical by composer Alan Menken and writer Howard Ashman.
\textsuperscript{74} A 1992 musical with book by Ken Ludwig, which won that season’s Tony Award for Best Musical.
In addition to nostalgia, the 1980s and 1990s saw the so-called “megamusical”\textsuperscript{75}, which Jones prefers to call the “technomusical,” because of its reliance upon theatre technology and spectacle instead of real content (p. 322). \textit{Cats}\textsuperscript{76}, \textit{Les Misérables}\textsuperscript{77}, \textit{The Phantom of the Opera}\textsuperscript{78}, and \textit{Miss Saigon}\textsuperscript{79} are oft-cited examples of this musical theatre genre, with their fantastic scenery, costumes, and technical effects (for their time periods), in addition to their long runs on Broadway and incredible box office figures.\textsuperscript{80}

Jones finishes his presentation of the social history of American musical theatre with the 2000-2001 Broadway season—exactly at the time this thesis picks up—and notes a return to purely diversionary musicals and a Disney “Broadway as Theme Park” mentality\textsuperscript{81} (p. 322). Jones concludes his book by conjecturing that a return to this kind of transparent entertainment musical, like what was seen in the foundational days of musical theatre in the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century and 1920s, suggests the end of a century-long cycle and a new beginning for the American musical.

\textsuperscript{75} The Broadway megamusical mirrored the Hollywood phenomenon of the “blockbuster”—a large production that sold an extraordinary number of tickets and blew any competition out of the water.
\textsuperscript{76} This 1982 Broadway musical is by British writer Andrew Lloyd Webber and is based on \textit{Old Possum’s Book of Practical Cats} by T. S. Eliot.
\textsuperscript{77} Colloquially known as \textit{Les Mis} or \textit{Les Miz}, this 1987 Broadway musical is by French composer-lyricist team Claude-Michel Schönberg and Alain Boublil and is based on the French novel of the same name by Victor Hugo.
\textsuperscript{78} This 1988 Broadway musical was composed by Andrew Lloyd Webber with lyrics by Charles Hart and is based on the French novel \textit{Le Fantôme de l’Opéra} by Gaston Leroux.
\textsuperscript{79} This 1991 Broadway musical is by Claude-Michel Schönberg and Alain Boublil, with additional lyrics by Richard Maltby, Jr. and is a 1970s Vietnam War adaptation of Giacomo Puccini’s opera \textit{Madame Butterfly}.
\textsuperscript{80} See the “American Art Meets American Business” section below for a more in-depth discussion of the megamusical.
\textsuperscript{81} See the “American Art Meets American Business” section below for a more in-depth discussion of Disney on Broadway.
One of Jones’ examples of this 21st century Broadway environment is *The Producers*. Here, Jones provides an excellent “jumping-off point” for this thesis, because *The Producers* is an excellent example of the very phenomena this thesis explores: *The Producers* was adapted into a stage musical from the film of the same name, was produced and written by famed screenwriter-director-comedian Mel Brooks, and starred film celebrities Nathan Lane and Matthew Broderick. While Jones is not incorrect that the Broadway musicals of the early 21st century are diversionary in nature, I believe he has mistaken a societal fascination with celebrity and popular culture for a societal need for diversion (although the two are certainly not mutually exclusive, as the “Popular Culture & Celebrity” section below will show). After all, the season in which *The Producers* opened saw many other celebrity-oriented musicals on Broadway as well, like *Beauty and the Beast*, *The Lion King*, *Footloose*, *Saturday Night Fever*, *The Full Monty*, *The Rocky Horror Show*, and *Seussical*.

---

82 The plot of *The Producers* concerns the get-rich-quick scheme of two theatrical producers who oversell investment interests in a Broadway flop. However, their show unexpectedly turns out to be a hit, and hilarity ensues.

83 In addition to being an adaptation of a popular film, *Beauty and the Beast* utilized celebrity casting—R&B artist Toni Braxton, ‘80s pop singer Deborah Gibson, Disney Channel actresses Christy Carlson Romano and Anneliese van der Pol, and HBO’s *The Sopranos* actress Jamie-Lynn Sigler—as replacement actors.

84 A musical adaptation of the 1984 film of the same name.

85 A musical adaptation of the 1977 film of the same name.

86 A musical adaptation of the 1997 film of the same name.

87 A revival of the musical made popular by the 1975 film *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, which utilized celebrity casting: television talk show hosts Dick Cavett, Sally Jessy Raphael, and Jerry Springer; *Beverly Hills 90210* actor Luke Perry; rock singer Sebastian Bach; *Saturday Night Live* actress Ana Gasteyer; and magicians Penn & Teller.

88 A musical adaptation of the work of popular children’s author and cartoonist Dr. Seuss, which utilized celebrity casting—comedienne and media personality Rosie O’Donnell, Olympic gymnast Cathy Rigby, and teen pop star Aaron Carter—as replacement actors.
The capitalization on this societal fascination seems a logical response for Broadway, as an artistic enterprise that relies on being commercially viable. This literature review now turns its focus to that sometimes-dichotomous intersection of art and business on Broadway and, increasingly, in American theatre generally.

**American Art Meets American Business**

Undeniably, Broadway has always been a place for making money. Irving Berlin's Broadway anthem "There's No Business Like Show Business" explicitly broadcasts that the Broadway musical is the intersection of arts and business (Wall, 1996):

There's no business like show business,
  Like no business I know.
  Everything about it is appealing,
  Everything that traffic will allow.
Nowhere could you get that happy feeling,
  When you are stealing that extra bow.

There's no people like show people.
  They smile when they are low.
Even with a turkey that you know will fold,
  You may be stranded out in the cold,
Still you wouldn't change it for a sack of gold.
  Let's go on with the show!\(^8^9\)

More subtly, the song suggests that this intersection of art and commerce is an actualization of the American dream—that one should pursue what he/she enjoys, and if one fails, reinvent and try again. In other words, show business is positively American in its spirit and its economics.

\(^8^9\) Source: www.lyricsfreak.com
This balance between art and commerce—on Broadway and in the not-for-profit theatre—is a delicate one. Many scholars and journalists have worried that the scales are disproportionally shifting towards commerce and away from artistic integrity, particularly since the 1980s. The following section of this literature review examines how this perceived imbalance came to be. Unlike the previous historical section, a significant full-length book is not reviewed here, but rather journal and scholarly articles were consulted. The two overarching topics in this subsection are: 1) The blurring of lines between not-for-profit and commercial theatre producers; and 2) The further “corporatization” of the already commercial enterprise that is Broadway.

**Not-for-profit & For-profit Blurring**

Not-for-profit theatre proliferated the United States from the 1950s to the 1980s, leveling off in the early 1990s (Cherbo, 1998). Prior to that time, New York was perceived as the center of all theatre (Wall, 1996), and the not-for-profit movement was partly fueled by the desire to move theatre beyond Broadway (Cherbo, 1998). This resulted in the rapid growth of not-for-profit resident theatres, university theatres, and performing arts centers across the country (Cherbo, 1998).

In the 1980s, as institutional growth started leveling, the not-for-profit arts—not only theatres, but across arts disciplines—began showing signs that

---

90 Examples include Arena Stage in Washington, DC; The Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park in Ohio; The Goodman Theatre in Chicago, Illinois; and La Jolla Playhouse in California.

91 Examples include Yale Repertory Theatre and American Repertory Theatre at Harvard.

92 Examples include Playhouse Square in Cleveland, Ohio; The Denver Center for the Performing Arts in Colorado; and The Ordway Center for the Performing Arts in St. Paul, Minnesota.
they thought utilizing some commercial elements was necessary for survival. One example is the Joffrey Ballet\textsuperscript{93} selling their own line of dance and leisurewear, and another example is Plácido Domingo\textsuperscript{94} and John Denver\textsuperscript{95} recording an album together (Langley & Abruzzo, 1990). Arts organizations also began capitalizing on their fixed assets, such as New York’s Museum of Modern Art allowing a luxury condominium to be built above the facility to help fund museum expansion (Langley & Abruzzo, 1990). This movement towards some commercialization was one response to the need for additional and innovative sources of funding to combat the “cost disease”\textsuperscript{96} (Cherbo, 1998).

One of the theatre’s specific solutions was for commercial producers and not-for-profit theatres to join forces—a trend that has grown in prevalence since the late 1970s; these partnerships have manifested in the following ways (or combinations of ways):

1) A not-for-profit can self-finance a commercial transfer of a production they have developed, wherein any profits accrue to the not-for-profit;\textsuperscript{97}

2) A not-for-profit can license a production they have developed to commercial producers, wherein they negotiate a percentage of revenues, any profits, and subsidiary rights;\textsuperscript{98}

\textsuperscript{93} A Chicago-based, not-for-profit dance company.
\textsuperscript{94} A Spanish opera singer.
\textsuperscript{95} An American singer-songwriter, who was especially popular in the 1970s.
\textsuperscript{96} William J. Baumol and William G. Bowen’s 1966 publication *Performing Arts: The Economic Dilemma, A study of problems common to theater, opera, music, and dance* says that rising wages in the productive sector increase the cost of artistic production. If the arts cannot match productivity increases, costs rise over time and artistic output declines. The authors call this phenomenon the “cost disease.” In other words, the stagnant revenues generated by the arts cannot cover the ever-increasing costs of producing the arts, and therefore, a portion of funding for the arts must increasingly come from additional external sources.
\textsuperscript{97} The Public Theatre’s 1975 Broadway transfer of *A Chorus Line* (made possible by loans from board members) was the first production to do this. The production generated $39 million in profits from its initial $1.1 million investment and helped subsidize the not-for-profit’s endeavors and create an endowment for the organization (cited in Ballou & Levy, 2002).
3) A not-for-profit can receive “enhancement money”\textsuperscript{99} from commercial producers to develop a production they cannot afford to develop on their own; and/or

4) A commercial producer may take a property to a not-for-profit as a kind of laboratory “try out” for the work\textsuperscript{100} (Cherbo, 1998).

In her 1998 paper, \textit{Creative Synergy: Commercial and Nonprofit Live Theatre in America}, Joni Maya Cherbo describes the ways in which these relationships have had positive effects for not-for-profits:

Commercial involvement benefits the not for profits in a number of ways. Not only does it make it possible for a show to be mounted that might otherwise not be affordable, but a successful run and/or commercial transfer enhances the reputation of the not for profit theater and artistic personnel involved. (p. 13)

These partnerships benefit commercial producers as well, or they would not participate. Real estate in New York City is some of the most expensive in the United States, making theatre production and maintenance an incredible expense (among other factors). From the viewpoint of Broadway producers, a shift in provenance of new shows has helped them combat the almost insurmountable costs of creating something specifically for Broadway. Citing a 1997 report by Bain and Company, Cherbo (1998) writes that prior to the 1960s, 60\% of new plays and musicals originated on Broadway; however, since 1969,

\textsuperscript{98} Subsidiary rights are rights to publish or produce a work in different formats that are based on the original work, such as merchandise and film rights.

\textsuperscript{99} Enhancement money is money that a commercial producer pays to a not-for-profit theatre to help subsidize a production. A commercial producer may contribute money to raise the show’s production values and get a sense of how it would look in a bigger theatre for a potential future commercial run.

\textsuperscript{100} For example, Jonathan Larson’s musical \textit{Rent} was taken to the New York Theater Workshop by commercial producers. These producers provided enhancement money for the development of the piece.
that figure has almost exactly reversed. Cherbo goes on to say that 20 of the 25 Pulitzer Prize-winning plays from 1969 to 1996 began in regional theatres, and 30% of the Tony Awards for Best Musical from 1969 to 1996 were awarded to productions that were initially developed outside of Broadway, according to Theatre Communications Group’s 1996 *Theatre Facts* report.

Regardless of origin, a Broadway run is still popularly viewed as an endorsement for a piece of theatre, and the “export of New York” to the rest of the nation via touring shows and local productions of shows that once played on Broadway is still prevalent (Wall, 1996, p. 41). Citing the Broadway League\(^{101}\), Cherbo (1998) points out that 70-80% of the plays and musicals used by theatres around the country have had a Broadway run. In other words, shows produced on Broadway provide a significant portion of material for not-for-profit theatres and are one more way that commercial and not-for-profit theatre cannot be disentwined from each other (Jones, 1996).

With the ever-growing costs to produce on Broadway, commercial producers sometimes complain that not-for-profits disproportionately benefit from partnerships and this interconnectedness, because not-for-profits do not assume the same risks as commercial producers: A not-for-profit will not lose its shirt if one production is a financial failure, because other sources of revenue, such as subscriptions, may offset the loss (Cherbo, 1998). While this is certainly not an

\(^{101}\) Formerly, the League of American Theatres and Producers and the League of New York Theatres and Producers. The Broadway League is national trade association for the Broadway industry.
unfounded concern on commercial producers’ part, the not-for-profit theatre community has their own share of complaints about commercial producers. The following pages of this literature review now turn to a significant focus of those grievances: the corporatization of Broadway.

**The Corporatization of Broadway**

Corporatization is a process wherein smaller and smaller numbers of organizations gain control over a widening amount of a given product (Wollman, 2002). As it has related to Broadway, it means not just that a small number of theatre producers have control of the product, but also that producers from outside the theatrical industry are gaining control of the product. Even in the already commercial world of Broadway, the lines between commercial theatrical producers and corporate producers are blurring.

Some cite the beginning of this trend in the 1980s, coinciding with the megamusical era discussed in the historical subsection above. During this period, British producer Cameron Mackintosh\(^{102}\) became one of the most powerful producers on both the West End\(^{103}\) and on Broadway, and he introduced a previously unseen, more corporate way of marketing commercial theatre (Wienir & Langley, 2004). Musicals were marketed not with the artists involved in the shows, but with simple logo branding. Examples include the

\(^{102}\) The producer of such shows as *Cats, Les Misérables, The Phantom of the Opera*, and currently, *Mary Poppins*.

\(^{103}\) The West End is an area of central London containing many of the city’s major tourist attractions, including commercial theatres.
yellow cat eyes of *Cats*, the white mask of *The Phantom of the Opera* (see image below), and the pauper girl of *Les Misérables*.

Figure 2.1: *The Phantom of the Opera* Logo, Majestic Theatre Marquee (Personal photograph by author, March 2010)

In their 2004 book, *Making It On Broadway: Actors’ Tales of Climbing to the Top*, David Wienir and Jodie Langley quote Ann Miller\(^{104}\) on the corporate nature of this choice to brand musicals:

‘The trick the producers developed was to make the logos the star of the show, not the performers. It was a business decision, because if anyone dropped out of the show, they could insert somebody new into the show and nobody would know the difference. The show could carry on and draw crowds, whether on Broadway or a national tour.’ (p. 150)

The overall effect of the marketing, coupled with other appealing elements like spectacle, was the broadened appeal of musical theatre to a larger, national audience (Wienir & Langley, 2004). As quoted in Elizabeth Wollman’s (2002) “The Economic Development of the ‘New’ Times Square and Its Impact on the

\(^{104}\) The American dancer-singer-actress famous for her movie-musical roles (such as Lois in *Kiss Me Kate*) and her stage-musical roles (such as Ann in *Sugar Babies*).
Broadway Musical,” Broadway producer Tom Viertel\textsuperscript{105} said: “They once asked [George Abbot\textsuperscript{106}] what the biggest change in theater was during his lifetime and he said electricity. The biggest change in my lifetime is clearly the jet plane. We cater to a tourist audience now that is ever-renewing…” (p. 450).

Steve Nelson echoed this sentiment in his 1995 article “Broadway and the Beast: Disney Comes to Times Square”: “The earlier periods of spectacle ascendancy on Broadway were sustained by the theatergoing habits of city residents, augmented by out-of-towners. Now it is the other way around” (p. 75). But Nelson is crediting this change to the next significant corporatizing event on Broadway: the arrival of the Walt Disney Company (hereafter, Disney).

Disney came to Times Square in the mid-1990s to renovate the long-vacant New Amsterdam Theatre on 42\textsuperscript{nd} Street, which they would occupy with their new stage musical, \textit{Beauty and the Beast}. At the time, it was the most expensive musical ever brought to Broadway, with its impressive costumes, scenery, and technical effects (Nelson, 1995). As Nelson (1995) puts it, “Already adept at blending the mechanical and the living in outdoor entertainments, Disney felt ready to try a theme park where the seats stay put” (p. 79).

Disney spent $8 million of their own money and received $21 million at three percent interest from the City of New York to renovate the New Amsterdam (Nelson, 1995). The City also receives two percent of the theatre’s gross ticket

\textsuperscript{105} A lead producer on \textit{The Producers}, among others.

\textsuperscript{106} A commercial theatre producer whose career spanned more than eight decades of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century.
receipts for the 49 years that Disney has exclusive use of the theatre (Nelson, 1995).

It seems worth noting—if only as a matter of poignant coincidence—that the New Amsterdam is the very theatre that was once home to Florenz Ziegfeld’s Follies revues. Moreover, Disney’s negotiations with the City began in 1994, the year that had (arbitrarily) been named the 100th anniversary of Broadway by the Broadway League (Nelson, 1995). Disney’s arrival was literally and symbolically the dawning of a new period in Broadway’s history.

The commercial stage has long been the place for splashy producers with lots of money, and Disney did not bring the concept of technical or marketing excess to Broadway any more than did Ziegfeld or Mackintosh in their respective times. The difference, as Nelson (1995) describes it, is that “Disney is a 300-pound gorilla like no other” (p. 71). Nelson goes on to point out:

They [Disney] aren’t in the theatre business. Their business is creating venues for the sale and promotion of all things Disney... 42nd Street is cheap theme-park real estate: a place where, with subsidies and tax breaks, Disney can transform a theatrical district gone to seed into a satellite Main Street USA... Those who see Disney’s frequently banal aesthetics and bottomless pockets as the death of Broadway miss the point: Eisner is Dr. Frankenstein, not Dr. Kevorkian. Broadway is being re-membered with mouse ears and fireworks to belt out ‘Be our guest!’ (p. 84)

107 Currently, Mary Poppins is the musical tenant of the New Amsterdam Theatre. Coincidentally, Cameron Mackintosh is one of the producers.
108 Many theatres opened in what is now the Times Square area in 1884, but Broadway as a theatrical district was not established until the turn of the century (Nelson, 1995).
109 Michael Eisner was the Chief Executive Officer of Disney from 1984 to 2005.
110 Dr. Jacob Kevorkian is best known for championing a terminal patient’s right to die via physician-assisted suicide.
The above quote assertively articulates a new corporate environment on Broadway, and other entertainment companies have quickly followed Disney’s lead: In 1997, Hallmark Entertainment\textsuperscript{111} took on a producing role in \textit{The Scarlet Pimpernel}\textsuperscript{112}. A year later, Radio City Entertainment, a division of Cablevision Systems Corporation\textsuperscript{113}, purchased the struggling show, becoming the first corporation to buy out a running Broadway production (Simonson, 1998). At the time of the buyout, Cablevision’s Radio City Entertainment was already a producer on the then-forthcoming musical \textit{Footloose} as well. Moreover, Clear Channel Entertainment\textsuperscript{114} has been a producer on over two-dozen Broadway musicals since the late 1990s.

This corporatization—which was accelerated by the arrival of first one, then many, entertainment companies who, at least, have an indirect connection to the arts in their programming—has since extended to corporations that often had no previous connection whatsoever to the arts or to the theatre:

![Figure 2.2: Snapple Theater Center, Times Square (Personal photograph by author, March 2010)](image)

\textsuperscript{111} Hallmark Entertainment was a producer of television shows and mini-series. The company was acquired by and absorbed into RHI Entertainment in 2006.

\textsuperscript{112} \textit{The Scarlet Pimpernel} is a musical with music by Frank Wildhorn and lyrics and book by Nan Knighton. It is based on the novel of the same name by Baroness Orczy.

\textsuperscript{113} Cablevision Systems Corporation is the 8\textsuperscript{th} largest cable television provider in America.

\textsuperscript{114} Clear Channel Communications specializes in radio broadcasting, concert promotion and hosting, and advertising through its subsidiaries. Clear Channel Entertainment is one subsidiary, which was renamed Live Nation in 2005.
In addition to the Snapple Theater Center in Times Square, what was formerly the Hilton\textsuperscript{115} Theatre was recently renamed the Foxwoods\textsuperscript{116} Theatre in 2010, the American Airlines Theatre sits across the street from Disney’s New Amsterdam Theatre (discussed more in-depth below), and Madison Square Garden has had its WaMu\textsuperscript{117} Theatre since 2007.

Tom Viertel describes one effect of these companies’ presence: “Independent producers can’t really compete with the Disneys and Cablevisions… The only people who can do that are large companies who have other fish to fry besides simply making a profit out of the endeavor itself” (as quoted in Wollman, 2006, p. 152). George C. Wolfe\textsuperscript{118} is quoted in a 1998 New York Times article on the subject, and he expresses his additional concern for corporations’ ulterior motives in this way: “Corporate thought process defining the artistic journey results in mediocrity becoming the standard… When an American musical really works, it is somehow the individual soaring. No corporate structure can duplicate that” (Singer, 1998, ¶ 41).

Concerns about corporate involvement have, more recently, extended beyond commercial theatre and reached some not-for-profit theatre as well. (They are quite connected, after all, as the previous subsection discussed.) Roundabout Theatre Company (hereafter, Roundabout) in New York City provides one such example. Roundabout is currently one of the largest not-for-

\textsuperscript{115} Hilton Worldwide is an international chain of hotels and resorts.
\textsuperscript{116} Foxwoods Resort Casino is an East Coast resort casino.
\textsuperscript{117} “WaMu” is the nickname for the banking company Washington Mutual.
\textsuperscript{118} Playwright and director who won a Tony Award in 1996 for his direction of the musical Bring in ‘da Noise/Bring in ‘da Funk.
profit theatre companies in the United States, having grown from only 400 subscribers in their inaugural 1965 season to over 40,000 subscribers today (Roundabout, 2011). This theatre company is especially fascinating to look at regarding the topic of commercialism and corporatization, as they are a not-for-profit who owns two Broadway theatres and manages another, in addition to their Off-Broadway119 theatre. The pressure of their commercial Broadway neighbors has clearly come into play, more so than it likely would if the company was in a different geographic location.

In 2000, Roundabout purchased and renovated what was then called the Selwyn Theatre on 42nd Street with the help of American Airlines, Inc. In exchange for a financial contribution of $8.5 million over ten years—the largest contribution ever received by Roundabout—the theatre would bear the corporation’s name (Ballou & Levy, 2002). Prior to this event, no major not-for-profit theatre had ever been named for a corporation (Ballou & Levy, 2002). The theatre community’s reaction to this decision was largely negative, and the cartoon on the following page appeared in The New York Times shortly after the announcement:

119 Off-Broadway is the term for a professional venue in New York City with a seating capacity between 99 and 499 (smaller than Broadway theatres). They also, frequently, present less commercial works than Broadway and are considered a more nurturing theatrical environment.
Figure 2.3: March 4, 2000 New York Times Cartoon Regarding the Newly Named American Airlines Theatre (from Ballou & Levy, 2002)
While often criticized for becoming too commercial and corporate over the years, Roundabout asserts that neither American Airlines nor any other corporate sponsor has any artistic say in Roundabout’s programming (Ballou & Levy, 2002). In the case of American Airlines, the corporation receives prime signage space only, and Roundabout’s management sees no compromise in the not-for-profit theatre receiving support from new sources (Ballou & Levy, 2002). Nonetheless, *New York Observer* writer John Heilpern (as presented in Ballou & Levy, 2002) still scoffed at the decision:

> Oh, Mr. Haimes! Oh dear, Mr. Haimes! We need not be Wittgenstein to see that American Airlines isn’t supporting the arts, bless them. They are paying a tax-deductible fee in order to advertise and sell their corporate logo on Broadway. Philanthropy has sweet zilch to do with it... There’s surely a difference between arts patronage and corporate marketing, between loving the theater and using it. (p. B6)

Across the country, other not-for-profits have also begun approaching corporate support from a different perspective due to the general “scaling back of straight-up corporate arts philanthropy” (Cox, 2007, ¶ 4). With corporate resources for the arts seeming to grow more and more scarce (due to a multitude of factors, like natural disaster relief and the current economic recession), organizations like the National Corporate Theatre Fund have felt the need to find middle ground between a donation and an advertisement (Cox, 2007). According to Richard Jaffe in 2007, then the Director of External Relations at

---

120 Todd Haimes is the Artistic Director of Roundabout.
121 Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) was a famous Austrian philosopher.
122 NCTF is an association of ten not-for-profit theatres across the country, which focuses on increasing corporate support and participation in theatre.
Trinity Repertory Company in Providence, Rhode Island, “We’re telling corporations that we should be talking to both their philanthropy people and their marketing people…It’s a gray area” (quoted in Cox, 2007, ¶ 22).

Wollman (2002) expresses concern for this shift away from corporate philanthropic giving towards a more explicit quid-pro-quo relationship when she says, “Corporations might be helping the American theater, then, but arguably not as much as theater is helping corporations” (p. 462). In other words many see the benefits to corporations in these relationships—with both commercial and not-for-profit theatre—far outweighing the benefits to the theatre community. In fact, as they see it, corporatization actually has the potential for long-term detrimental effects on the theatre in how it fundamentally changes the priorities of those who are producing theatre.

In sum, the presence of large entertainment companies and other corporate companies on Broadway and in regional theatres has seemed a greater concern to journalists and scholars than it has to the theatre industry itself (Wollman, 2002). New York Times drama critic Frank Rich (1998) put the danger of this complacency well:

...[T]he biggest, most humbling mistake I discovered—and I feel only slightly defensive about it, since everyone else in or around the theater made it, too—was my utter failure to anticipate the single most important change on Broadway in decades: the arrival of Disney as a redevelopment force, which led in turn to the happy revival of 42nd Street and the entire Times Square neighborhood but, less happily, to the impending corporatization of the American theater, on Broadway and beyond. (¶ 8)
In part, this thesis strives to better understand if practitioners in the field today really are as complacent as those previous writers suggested they were ten-plus years ago.

Clearly, capitalizing on what is popular is part of commercialism, but it is also part of a corporate thought process. Today’s use of celebrity on Broadway seems an obvious extension of that process, ushered in by the use of commercial marketing techniques, the presence of gargantuan entertainment companies, and the corporatization of Broadway. Journalists and scholars writing more than ten years ago foreshadowed but did not explicitly predict the celebrity phenomenon. To understand potentially why Broadway has evolved in this direction, this literature review now turns its focus to American entertainment media and its fascination with celebrity.

Entertainment Media & Celebrity Culture

As Herbert J. Gans (1999) says in “The Critique of Mass Culture,” “[T]here is no doubt that the media have had an effect on society. They have, for example, speeded up the demise of folk cultures…” (p. 53). Rich (2001) reiterates Gans’ assertion of the often negative role of entertainment media on indigenous culture when he writes: “[T]he biggest impediment to the American culture today… is not the noisy censors of the Religious Right, and it isn’t the limited public resources for culture funding. The biggest threat to the arts instead comes from the private sector—specifically, our mass entertainment media” (p. 20).
The following pages concerning entertainment media and celebrity culture are divided into two subsections and, once again, return to the format of consulting a full-length book for each subsection. The first subsection looks at a book about the rise of visual media as popular culture in America, and the second subsection is devoted to a book regarding Americans’ fascination with celebrity.

*Amusing Ourselves To Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* by Neil Postman[^123]

While first published over 25 years ago, Postman’s 1985 book is relevant in understanding how the American fascination with celebrity came to look as it does today. Throughout history, humans have been drawn to various celebrities as they appeared in their time—from ancient philosophers to Renaissance artists to modern radio personalities—but Postman’s book specifically discusses the growth of television and visual entertainment in America and how these influences have reshaped all aspects of culture.

Postman says: “The clearest way to see through a culture is to attend to its tools for conversation” (p. 8), and the overarching argument in his book is that television and other visually driven media have created a new television-based epistemology[^124] in America, which is a shift from what Postman considers the superior print-based epistemology. This shift can be traced via the development

[^123]: This book also has relevance for the methodology of this research, discourse analysis. See “Chapter 3: Methodology.”
[^124]: Epistemology refers to the origins and nature of knowledge.
of communication in America—from what he labels the “Age of Exposition” to the “Age of Show Business” (p. 63).

During Postman’s Age of Exposition, society was marked by the “typographic mind” (p. 44). While the printed word is certainly available now in more abundance than ever before, Postman points out that from the 17th century to the late 19th century, printed matter was, essentially, the only thing that was available. The typographic mind of that time could listen to seven hours of image-free oratory, for example, without any problem. For Postman, this is the most useful type of mind:

To engage the written word means to follow a line of thought, which requires considerable powers of classifying, inference-making and reasoning… [A] good reader does not cheer an apt sentence or pause to applaud even an inspired paragraph. Analytic thought is too busy for that, and too detached. (p. 51)

According to Postman, the decline of the typographic mind began with the invention and the proliferation of the telegraph. The telegraph—and the context-free information it transmitted—was novel, interesting, and incited curiosity. Its usefulness was not because it was a means to collect, explain, or analyze information; it was useful only as a means to move information in abundance and with great speed. It provided many topics from near and far to talk about, but nothing that could lead to any meaningful action on the part of the listener. Coupled with the photograph—which, by definition, isolates an image from context—the door was opened for what Postman calls a “peek-a-boo world” (p. 64):
Together, this ensemble of electronic techniques called into being a new world—a peek-a-boo world—where now this event, now that, pops into view for a moment, then vanishes again... a world that is, like a child’s game of peek-a-boo, entirely self-contained. But like peek-a-boo, it is also endlessly entertaining. (p. 77)

Enter: Television. Postman argues that television is not just entertaining but has made entertainment itself the natural format for the representation of all experience. The in-depth details of the many facets of life that television and its peek-a-boo mentality have changed are not entirely useful for this literature review, but it is important to note the prevalence that entertainment came to have in daily life with the advent of the television. To briefly convey the feeling of the details Postman writes, he calls his chapter on journalism “Now... This” (p. 99), reiterating the context-free nature of how the news is delivered and received. Religious experiences are a “shuffle off to Bethlehem”\(^{125}\) (p. 114), and in politics, one should “reach out and elect someone”\(^{126}\) (p. 125). Moreover, television has shown it is important that educators see “teaching as an amusing activity” (p. 142).

According to Postman, “The problem is not that television presents us with entertaining subject matter but that all subject matter is presented as entertaining, which is another issue altogether” (p. 87). He asserts that unapologetic fluff on television is completely acceptable, but television should never be the medium for anything of import because, “We do not measure a

\(^{125}\) This is wordplay on the tap dance step called a “Shuffle Off to Buffalo.”
\(^{126}\) The once-famous advertising tag line of the telephone company AT&T.
culture by its output of undisguised trivialities but by what it claims as significant” (p. 16). One need only watch television programs like Access Hollywood, which presents information about celebrities as “serious” news content, to see how entertainment and significance have become completely confused.

Postman frames his book by both beginning and concluding with a juxtaposition of George Orwell’s 1984 and Aldous Huxley’s Brave New World, saying that while both books are often thought to prophesize the same thing, they do not. Postman says that Orwell foresees a future in which we will be overcome by externally imposed oppression and controlled by the infliction of pain. In Huxley’s version of control, however, oppression comes by inflicting pleasure, wherein we come to love our oppression: “…[W]hat afflicted the people in Brave New World was not that they were laughing instead of thinking, but that they did not know what they were laughing about and why they had stopped thinking” (p. 163). The point of Postman’s book and its discussion of how entertainment has infiltrated our lives is that there is the potential for Huxley to have been right. He even goes so far as to say, “…Americans are the best entertained and quite likely the least well-informed people in the Western world” (p. 106).

Postman was not incorrect in his Huxleyan prediction that media would become the ultimate force to be reckoned with in society. Notably, media are among the most powerful forces in the lives of young people today; they spend more time interacting with media than any other activity—maybe even more than sleeping (Rideout et al., 2010). In early 2010, the Henry J. Kaiser Family
Foundation published a report on the media habits of 8- to 18-year-olds after surveying over 2,000 individuals from across the country regarding television, computer, video game, music, print, cell phone, and movie use (Rideout et al., 2010). The report shows that in 1999, the average amount of time spent with media for young people was 6 hours, 19 minutes; ten years later, in 2009, it was 7 hours, 38 minutes. Postman would, no doubt, be displeased but not surprised.

Now that I have come to end of this subsection, it is important to note that Broadway has always been a part of “show business,” even though it was around before what Postman calls the Age of Show Business. In fact, he even quotes a musical composer, saying, “Had Irving Berlin changed one word in the title of his celebrated song, he would have been as prophetic, albeit more terse, as Aldous Huxley. He need only have written, There’s No Business But [italics added] Show Business” (p. 98).

However, Postman describes the lights of Las Vegas as the symbol of American spirit and aspiration, not the lights of Broadway. I think—perhaps only subconsciously—Postman recognizes that there is an inherent difference between the two: Las Vegas makes no claims of artistic integrity, but Broadway—even with its commercial entertainment appeal—has often provided material for insight, thought, and reflection, in addition to amusement. But if Postman were writing now, he might very well choose Broadway over Las Vegas as his symbol, with the trends towards increased commercialism, corporatization, and the use of celebrity on Broadway. For an even better understanding of the
last item on this list, the literature review now turns to a book that explores the reasons why Americans have become so obsessed with a certain kind of celebrity culture in the recent past.

_The Cult of Celebrity: What Our Fascination with the Stars Reveals About Us_ by Cooper Lawrence

From the plethora of publications that exist regarding celebrity culture in America,¹²⁷ this book was selected for its recent publication date (2009) and the directness of the title. Lawrence calls her book not “The Culture of Celebrity” but _The Cult of Celebrity_ (emphasis added), which gets right to the heart of the American fascination with celebrity, at least as Lawrence describes it. Lawrence is a developmental psychologist, so much of the book focuses on celebrity culture’s effect on young people—which is not wholly limiting for this research, as young people are current and future musical theatre audiences—and she draws upon many scientific studies that have been done about celebrity influence on our lives in recent years.

Perhaps most relevant to the research in this thesis is a recent survey that “found that kids under ten years old believe the ‘very best thing in the world’ to become is a celebrity. For the 2,500 kids polled, ‘celebrity’ beat out ‘God,’ who ranked at only number ten. Clearly He needs a better publicisit” (p. x). On more levels than one, the celebrity-God comparison is appropriate, because celebrity worship is like a religion, according to Lawrence. As is the case with Jesus—no

---

need for the “of Nazareth” part—we do not need a last name to identify many
celebrities, like Paris\textsuperscript{128}, Beyoncé\textsuperscript{129}, and Oprah\textsuperscript{130}. Celebrities are worshipped
like gods and goddesses for the “it” factor they possess—that indefinable aura
that surrounds them. Celebrities are special and somehow above the rest of us,
just like God.

This God-like status we bestow upon celebrities comes, in part, from the
value society places on success. Celebrities seem to be the embodiment of
success because we are constantly bombarded with their images in everyday
life:

How do you know that someone is a celebrity, that this is a
person you should pay attention to? You know because you
see his or her image splashed on every celebrity-gossip
magazine while you’re standing in line at the supermarket, or
you regularly catch sight of them posing on the red carpet or
on Extra or the Insider. Media attention is like oxygen to
stars’ careers. (p. 51)

Coupled with seeing them so frequently, being able to identify a celebrity
by only their first name also gives us a sense of familiarity and intimacy with the
celebrity. After all, we do not need to call our friends by both their first and last
names. But this feeling of closeness is an illusion. We may feel that we know
everything about a celebrity, but they know nothing about us. We like this one-
sided relationship, however, because it is much easier than the complexities of
real-world relationships, and celebrities are afforded admiration and

\textsuperscript{128} Paris Hilton is an American hotel heiress and media personality.
\textsuperscript{129} Beyoncé Knowles is a popular recording artist, actress, and designer.
\textsuperscript{130} Oprah Winfrey is a television personality and the wealthiest woman in the world.
unconditional forgiveness for bad behavior that would not be afforded in other relationships, because of their celebrity status.

On the off chance that you do see a celebrity in person—say at an album signing event or an encounter in a restaurant—there is the feeling of a religious experience with “the shock of reality meeting fantasy” (p. 29): “In the situation of the celebrity encounter, we may feel as if some part of the celebrity has rubbed off on us—the air he or she breathes or his or her energy, charisma, or… saliva” (p. 33).

Celebrities’ are put on an all-knowing, all-powerful pedestal, which spreads their power beyond their fields of expertise. For example, if we worship celebrities, who better to tell us what we should buy? “When a star makes a judgment from up high on their celebrity pedestal—I prefer this brand of cola, mascara, credit card, car insurance—it enters our consciousness, even though we may not be aware it’s happening” (p. 108). Lawrence says that we have a strong attachment to “human brands” because human faces elicit emotional responses and we learn to attach ourselves to humans from infancy (p. 110). Therefore, attaching a celebrity to a product is a powerful sales technique for consumers of all ages, because of our need to continue our artificial feeling of closeness to them: “By saying what our favorite stars are saying, doing what they do, believing what they believe, we can maintain a relationship with them…” (p. 143).
Celebrities can make things seem “cool” that did not seem so before, but celebrities do not make a product objectively any better than another product. However, they often make the product more expensive. It is important to note that we can also become tired of a star if we see their face too much. Just as research has shown that violence on TV and in video games has desensitized us to violence, advertising starts to lose its effectiveness when we see hundreds of advertisements with stars every day.

Beyond endorsing other brands, stars themselves have become brands. Take Beyoncé, who is not just a recording artist, but also a fashion designer and film actor. “This trend toward the entertainer becoming the multitasking entrepreneur may explain why we use the word celebrity so often now. It is a catchall term that can describe so many levels and types of stardom” (p. 60). The term has also come to be applied to people who are famous for no particular talent, like reality television stars, and the distinction between the A-list and the D-list celebrities is quickly disappearing. Consequently, more and more people want to be celebrities and believe they deserve to be celebrities, particularly young people who have grown up with the “unrelenting presence” of media in their lives (p. 77).

In 2000, the psychologist Jeffrey Jensen coined the term “emerging adults” to describe a new generation of young people in their late teens and 20s. This term is based on the idea that the transition from adolescence to adulthood has been prolonged, with young people frequently moving back home after
college, extending their education instead of entering the workforce, and marrying later in life. During this time of emerging adulthood, many “pursue” careers as movie stars or pop singers, without putting any real effort into the pursuit (beyond failed auditions for *American Idol*\(^{131}\)). Lawrence says that emerging adults are fueled partly by the highly visible immaturity of many stars, which society often forgives and even celebrates:

The emerging adults see celebrities their age, and older, living in a kind of suspended adolescence, not having to deal with all the boring stuff in life... Instead, they see images of celebrities studded with jewels at red-carpet events, hanging out at clubs midweek, and playing with their toys (luxury cars, pedigree lapdogs, class A drugs, etc.) in the schoolyard (LA, New York). (p. 73)

That is not to say that the influence of celebrity culture is entirely negative. Celebrities influence us in many good ways as well, like the examples they provide in their many humanitarian efforts. In fact, at this point, it seems a celebrity *requirement* to champion disaster relief efforts and medical research or to adopt African babies. Moreover, research has shown that the best way to overcome prejudice (religious, ethnic, sexual, etc.) is to have personal experience with someone who is a different religion, culture, sexuality, etc.; for many, celebrities (such as lesbian Ellen DeGeneres\(^ {132} \)) help bridge this gap if they do not come across those types of people in their day-to-day lives.

\(^{131}\) A reality television singing contest that is the most-watched American television program of all time.

\(^{132}\) The American comedienne and television host.
Lawrence concludes her book by hypothesizing that celebrity worship is, ultimately, about a need to form bonds with others. For example, we can go to a party where we do not know anyone and strike up a conversation with a stranger about the latest celebrity gossip or Hollywood blockbuster: “With busy and often socially disconnected lives, celebrity worship may be one way to strengthen the social bonds that make us human. And perhaps *that* is what we are all really craving” (p. 237).

Lawrence does not explicitly include the appearance of celebrity on Broadway in her discussion, but one can easily make many inferences: The use of celebrity on Broadway provides consumers with the opportunity to be in the same room with the celebrities they worship. It also provides a kind of endorsement for a piece that a potential theatergoer might not otherwise think is “cool” or be interested in seeing. Broadway producers obviously understand this part of celebrity worship. However, if Lawrence is right about the need for social bonds driving our celebrity worship, Broadway has perhaps failed to recognize that sitting in a theatre with upwards of 500 other people is itself an act with huge potential for human connection. The question remains, is the use of celebrity enhancing or detracting from that opportunity?

Summary & Conclusion

The preceding literature review focused on three large areas that inform the current use of celebrity on Broadway and its relationship to the American musical, in the absence of significant scholarly research on the topic. Those
areas were: musical theatre history; the business-arts and commercial-not-for-profit intersections of Broadway; and entertainment media and celebrity culture. Together, the three component areas provide a broad context to begin to understand the current celebrity trend on Broadway.

In sum, when the American musical was born in the late 19th century and the early 20th century and continued to thrive into the early 1960s, it helped create a kind of popular culture that represented the distinctly American experience through its storytelling, its music, and its dance. Since the birth of television and rock and roll music, musical theatre has largely failed to continue to penetrate popular culture and, instead, has been bound by what an external popular culture dictates, in an effort to remain popularly relevant. In order to try and regain the status of popularity that Broadway once had, partnerships with not-for-profit organizations have been a way for commercial producers to reduce their bottom line, and highly commercial marketing techniques and corporatization have seemingly become necessary for Broadway’s financial survival. This research was conducted to explore if one specific element of this effort—the capitalization on society’s worship of popular celebrity—is helping or hurting the American musical, both today and in the long run.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Research Design

Published information on the quantitative effect of the use of celebrity in Broadway musicals can be found through box office figures; *Variety Magazine* has long-published Broadway’s show-by-show gross figures, which can be compiled and compared for those shows involving celebrity\(^{133}\). But there is little information on the *qualitative* effect of this phenomenon, particularly in regards to how it affects the stakeholders outside of those concerned solely with ticket sales to Broadway. Understanding the embedded qualitative repercussions of this financially motivated trend is important for the future of the art form. As Constance DeVereaux (2009) puts forth, arts managers must understand why institutionalized ways of thinking have become embedded in the collective thinking (like the capitalization on popular celebrity has) and question what these ways of thinking mean in planning for the future.

Data Collection Methods

The main methods of data collection in this research were interviews with individuals, as well as one focus group. If an individual expressed interest in

\(^{133}\) Santana (2009) is one such example.
participation in the research following a recruitment email, he or she was scheduled for an interview or the focus group. The various individual interviews took place in restaurants, coffee shops, the participants’ residences or offices, the researcher's residence, over the telephone, or via videoconference, depending on what was most convenient for each individual participant. The focus group took place in the researcher's residence. Participants signed consent forms or orally or electronically provided their consent prior to the interviews/focus group. The individual interviews lasted between 30 minutes and one hour, and the focus group lasted an hour and a half.

Non-human-participant research supplements the data gained from the individual interviews and the focus group. The following resources, as they concern Broadway and musical theatre, were examined and will be referenced in this report: magazines and newspapers, Broadway production marketing (billboards, etc.), and other publicly available media. This additional data provides a broader perspective in an edited, and sometimes more academic, forum—something different from the perspective provided by the unedited, candid individual interviews and the focus group.

Participant Sample

The majority of the individual interview participants and the focus group participants were identified through the researcher’s professional contacts in the

---

134 See Appendix A for recruitment emails.
135 See Appendix B for consent forms.
136 See Appendix C for interview/focus group questions.
musical theatre industry, and some participants were identified through snowball sampling\textsuperscript{137}. Many theatre professionals work on a “freelance” basis and do not often identify themselves with one particular institution, so participants were not chosen explicitly because of any current organizational affiliation, but because of the aggregate of work they have done in musical theatre. The final sample of 21 participants breaks down in the following manner:

\textit{Theatre Administrators}

(1) Producer & Casting Director  (1) Producer & Development Director
(1) Producer & Executive Director  (1) General Manager
(1) Casting Director  (1) Arts Entrepreneur & Business Owner
(1) Marketing Director  (1) Artistic Director & Choreographer

\textit{Theatre Artists}

(1) Composer  (1) Composer & Music Director
(1) Music Director  (2) Directors
(8) Actors

The largest group above, actors, are one of the most visible segments of the theatre community affected by the use of celebrity on Broadway, because celebrities who are cast in Broadway shows obviously take those jobs. The eight actors selected for this sample are diverse in terms of age, education, and years of experience in the musical theatre industry. They participated in a focus group, which was a way to include their multiple voices in this important category without having to inefficiently interview each of them individually. All others listed above were interviewed individually. It is also important to note that some

\textsuperscript{137} The term “snowball sampling” means that existing study participants recruited additional participants from among their contacts. Thus, the sample grows like a rolling snowball.
participants perform multiple professional roles in the musical theatre industry (such as being a producer and a development director, an artistic director and a choreographer, etc.).

Sample Selection Reasoning

There are a number of important groups that were excluded from the participant sample, due mainly to the fact that their voices have other forums in which to be heard. For example, no theatre critics were interviewed, because one can easily read their published reviews of the various musical productions involving celebrity. Additionally, as was mentioned in “Chapter 1: Introduction,” musical theatre audiences were not explicitly included, because this research is concerned with the voices of professionals within the industry.

The American theatre employs a variety of individuals in a variety of roles. In 2009, Theatre Communications Group member theatres\textsuperscript{138} alone employed 128,200 artists, administrators, and production personnel during 187,000 performances of 17,000 productions (Voss et al., 2009). Research participants were drawn from this vast theatrical community: They are professionals with expertise in musical theatre due to their participation in both Broadway and regional musical theatre production and programming over the course of their careers and who make a significant portion of their living in musical theatre. These are individuals who are not popularly famous and whose voices are not

\textsuperscript{138} TCG has nearly 700 member theatres and affiliate organizations, who are required to be not-for-profit organizations with minimum annual operating expenses of $50,000 and professional, paid leadership (among other eligibility requirements).
frequently accounted for in published literature, but whose work in musical theatre is extensive and important. These are people with a genuine stake in the musical theatre industry and who care passionately about their field and its future on levels that extend deeper than ticket sales figures.

Methods of Data Analysis

The qualitative approach used in analyzing the data gathered for this report is discourse analysis. For the purposes of this research, discourse is understood as “text and talk,” as well as other media, which together create a full understanding of how people converse and communicate (Schwandt, 2007). Discourse is the source of knowledge, and discourses create new knowledge for the future (Johnstone, 2002). By identifying and analyzing characteristics, themes, patterns, structures, tones, meanings, and/or contexts of the sample of discourses collected, I have created a new, layered, and interwoven discourse (or, to use a musical analogy, a “megamix” of discourse) about the use of celebrity in Broadway musicals and its effects on the indigenous American art form of musical theatre.

Presentation of the Research

The selection of participants in this research is not incredibly extensive, but the data gathered and how it is represented strives to be intensive. Someone who quickly skims “Chapter 4: Research Findings & Analysis” will immediately notice that it contains frequent direct quotation of the participants—sometimes as

---

139 A “megamix” is a medley remix containing multiple existing songs either layered or in succession.
short, poignant sentences, and sometimes as longer anecdotal narratives. As Ely et al. (1997) describe, it is important to recognize that “putting words on two dimensional paper is not what happens in a three dimensional world” (p. 19). In an effort to bridge this gap, the actual words of the participants were used as much as possible in the writing of this research. These are real, unedited texts that are honest and relevant, even if sometimes not grammatically perfect and occasionally tersely opinionated.

One will not see tables or charts in the pages of this report, as they would likely see in quantitative (and even in some qualitative) research. Instead, they will see blocks of texts and images, as the meaning of this qualitative work lies within the interaction of these media as a whole (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2000). Data “snapshots” are not what this research seeks. Instead, it seeks knowledge that lies in the stream of human lives, not in a detached, objective “truth” outside of human reality (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007).

Because it strives to represent the voices of the participants and the musical theatre industry in the most authentic way possible, this research also aims to communicate to the reader in an authentic way. The research topic is inherently more accessible than some more “theoretical” topics (because it concerns an element of popular culture), and the style of writing in this report aims to ensure that the academic writing of the research does not transform it into something inaccessible for the reader and inauthentic for the participants involved.
CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

Introduction

The specific questions that this thesis addresses are: How is the current trend of Broadway musicals’ use of celebrity changing the perceptions and practices of the American musical as an indigenous art form? And what might that mean for the prospects of the American musical moving forward? The following pages contain the voices of professionals in the field in response to these questions.

As was mentioned in “Chapter 1: Introduction,” the focus towards Broadway musicals is primarily on those produced since the year 2000, because of the explosion of the celebrity trend since that time. However, participants do occasionally discuss earlier musicals. For readers’ reference, Appendix D contains a listing of the use of celebrity in its various forms in Broadway musicals from the 1999-2000 season through the 2009-2010 season.

In terms of celebrity casting specifically, two important notes must be made: First, this report does not explicitly treat celebrities who originate Broadway roles and celebrities who serve as replacement actors differently,

140 “Celebrity,” as defined in “Chapter 1: Introduction” refers not just to individuals who are utilized in the cast or on the creative team of Broadway productions, but also to the use of popular source material, such as existing films and music.
although there are instances when the distinction does come up; participants seldom (although occasionally) made the distinction themselves. Second, the industry has coined a term for casting celebrities in bit parts in the theatre, as well as on television and in film: “stunt casting.” The pure definition of stunt casting only applies to celebrities cast in small roles simply for the kitschy and fun appeal of it (for example, the various talk show hosts who appeared as the narrator in *The Rocky Horror Show*, see Appendix D). However, here again, participants seldom made this distinction and generally referred to all use of celebrity casting on Broadway as stunt casting. Combined, these two facts suggest that while demarcations could be made, professionals in the industry often lump all celebrity casting together as having the same effect on their work.

This report now turns its focus to exactly what the qualitative effects of the use of celebrity on Broadway are. After interviewing 21 professionals from a variety of artistic and administrative roles within the musical theatre industry, there were five major themes surrounding celebrity on Broadway that emerged, which are each discussed in turn: 1) How it effects marketing efforts and the ability to attract audiences; 2) How it effects the artistic integrity of a production, either positively or negatively; 3) How it effects theatre artists by marginalizing them; 4) How it effects regional theatres involved in musical theatre programming; and 5) How it colors musical theatre professionals' visions for the future of the American musical.
Marketing & Audiences

Competing for Audiences

In Wollman’s 2002 article about the economic development of Times Square, which was referenced in “Chapter 2: Literature Review,” she said: “The lure of familiarity, it seems, cannot be underestimated… There is some indication that familiarity is rapidly becoming expected of musical production” (p. 450). Today, participants in this research would say that an element of familiarity in a production is not just a growing trend but a hard-and-fast requirement to compete and have any kind of success in today’s Broadway environment.

The familiarity of celebrity is one way that producers are able to attract audiences to their productions, and nearly every participant mentioned an understanding of this marketing technique. Brad Haak, a music director currently working on *Mary Poppins*\(^\text{141}\), put it this way:

> The combination of 9/11 sort of dovetailing with the last three years of economic recession we’ve been in, I think that, in some ways, that has led to audiences wanting to come to New York to see things that they know, and even the New York audiences wanting… the comfort of seeing something that they already have an association with. And that’s not necessarily a bad thing. (Personal communication, September 4, 2010)

Jessica Redish, Founding Artistic Director of the Music Theatre Company in Chicago, Illinois, echoed Haak:

> I ultimately think that people want to see themselves on stage… And so what you get with an experience like a

\(^{141}\) *Mary Poppins* is a 2006 Broadway musical based on the 1964 Disney film of the same name and the children’s books by P. L. Travers.
Mamma Mia!\textsuperscript{142}, for example, is you get to reminisce. You get to sit in a theatre and reminisce about that time that you first heard this song. And you get to, sort of, hearken back to a personal time for yourself, and you get to create your own story about this song... It's ultimately a case of 'The rent is too damn high\textsuperscript{143}'... I don't see what these producers are doing as evil. It's how you're going to survive. (Personal communication, February 5, 2011)

Travis Greisler, a freelance director, explains why celebrity seems so familiar and is so appealing to an audience:

‘I know that that guy that I saw on TV, Constantine, in that TV show that was in my living room is now standing on stage, and I get to see it live in front of my face in a show [Rock of Ages] that has music by Styx and Journey?\textsuperscript{144} That might be intriguing to me’... It's like, 'What are the things I know of in advance?' (Personal communication, March 20, 2010)

Figure 4.1: Rock of Ages, Brooks Atkinson Theatre (Personal photograph by author, March 2010)

\textsuperscript{142} Mamma Mia! is a musical by British playwright Catherine Johnson which uses the songs of the 1970s Swedish pop group ABBA.
\textsuperscript{143} This is a reference to the Rent Is Too Damn High Party in New York whose single issue is that rent in New York City is too high for its residents.
\textsuperscript{144} Constantine Maroulis was a finalist on American Idol and starred in the Broadway musical Rock of Ages, which features classic rock hits from the 1980s.
Justin Huff, a casting director at Telsey + Company\textsuperscript{145}, described the benefit in more universal entertainment terms:

Like anything, this is a business... Why do [Hollywood] movies sometimes not succeed? It's not necessarily because it was a bad movie. I think it's sometimes because there was no one in the movie who people know, and so there's nothing that the public can connect with... For example, I'm someone who's in the arts, and so if I hear something is good or I'm interested in something, I'll go see it, no matter who's in it. But I can see someone like my mother, who lives in the Midwest... she would have no desire to see that [piece of theatre] because it's nothing interesting to her... It's about, I think, what people can connect to. (Personal communication, August 5, 2010)

Actor Sloan Grenz, who is originally from New York and has worked widely in the regions, also recognizes the value in business-minded efforts to keep Broadway audiences coming back to the theatre:

I can’t dismiss Broadway, even when it’s at its most commercial or grotesque, because ultimately Broadway is what has the widest audience. Broadway is what gets people in the seats. And, like, maybe that makes me cheap. Maybe that makes Broadway cheap. But if you want to communicate persuasively, don’t you want the largest number of listeners possible? (Personal communication, July 24, 2010)

In the \textit{New York Times}' review of the currently playing Broadway musical \textit{The Addams Family}\textsuperscript{146}, even critic Ben Brantley (2010) emphasized the important role the familiar plays for an audience:

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{145} Telsey + Company is a one of the most prevalent casting agencies on Broadway. They are responsible for the casting process of the current productions of \textit{Spider-Man}, Baby It’s You!, \textit{Catch Me If You Can}, \textit{The Addams Family}, \textit{Rock of Ages}, \textit{Million Dollar Quartet}, \textit{Memphis}, \textit{Sister Act}, and \textit{Priscilla, Queen of the Desert}, among many others.

\textsuperscript{146} \textit{The Addams Family} is a musical with music and lyrics by Andrew Lippa and a book by Marshall Brickman and Rick Elice. The show is based on the Addams Family characters created
\end{flushleft}
This latest reincarnation of 'The Addams Family' is clearly relying, above all, on its title characters' high recognition factor. That such faith is not misplaced is confirmed by the audience’s clapping and snapping along with the first strains of the overture, which appropriates the catchy television theme song. When the curtain parts to reveal a Madame Tussauds¹⁴⁷-like tableau of the assembled Addamses, there is loud, salutatory applause. (¶ 3)

Figure 4.2: The Addams Family, Lunt-Fontanne Theatre (Personal photograph by author, March 2010)

Many participants shared stories of personal involvement in productions that did not contain enough elements that were familiar to audiences, which

---

¹⁴⁷ Madame Tussauds is a London wax museum with a number of branches in major cities around the world.
made it difficult for the production to attract an audience. Ann Arvia, a professional actress and voice teacher who is currently appearing on Broadway in *Mary Poppins*, said: “Somebody on the inside of *Scottsboro* [The Scottsboro Boys\(^{148}\)]… they said to me, ‘We don’t expect to run’… They’re like, ‘Who’s going to be our audience?’” (Personal communication, August 15, 2010). When *The Scottsboro Boys* opened on Broadway a couple months following Arvia’s interview, the show received largely favorable reviews: Elisabeth Vincentelli (2010) of the *New York Post* called it “vibrantly alive” (¶ 7), “grimly thought-provoking” (¶ 10), and “a thrillingly inventive and entertaining night at the theater” (¶ 11). Despite such positive reviews, it turns out that Arvia’s friend was right about attracting an audience; the show closed after only 29 previews\(^{149}\) and 49 performances.

Another anecdote comes from actor Zak Edwards: “I just did *Yank!*\(^{150}\) Off-Broadway. And when they were saying, you know, ‘We want to move to Broadway’ and blah, blah, blah, we were all thrilled and excited. And then we went, ‘Who outside of gay, elite, New York theatre people is going to really see this show?’” (Personal communication, August 15, 2010). Edwards recognized the challenge of attracting a sustainable audience, despite the fact that the show received very good reviews across-the-board: Steven Suskin (2010) of *Variety*

---

\(^{148}\) *The Scottsboro Boys* is a musical with a book by David Thompson, music by John Kander and lyrics by Fred Ebb, which is based on the Scottsboro Boys trial of the 1930s. No popular source material was utilized, and there were no celebrities associated with the production.

\(^{149}\) Previews are performances prior to the official opening date of a production; final details are still being worked out and often changes are still being made to the production.

\(^{150}\) *Yank!* is a musical with book and lyrics by David Zellnik and music by Joseph Zellnik. It tells the love story of a male photographer and a serviceman during World War II.
Magazine called Yank! “the most intriguing new American musical to reach New York in several seasons” (¶ 1) and a “moving winner of a musical that earns its exclamation point” (¶ 12). However, Yank! has yet to gain the attention of a wide audience and see a Broadway production.

Beyond just getting an audience to come to the theatre, many participants described the most successful use of celebrity as those instances when the show actually has something important to share with an audience once they are through the door:

You know, one of the things that I sort of take pride in with this show [Mary Poppins] is that while it is a known entity, our show is actually based equally on the books as it is the movie. So there’s a lot of material that’s very new for the audience that they didn’t expect to see in the show. And that, often times, leads to people not even realizing that there were books written a long time before Julie Andrews and Dick Van Dyke\textsuperscript{151} did the movie, and people want to go read those books and that kind of thing. So that’s great. (B. Haak, personal communication, September 4, 2010)

*Developing Audiences*

The need for producers to attract potential audiences to their production over their competitors’ productions is one part of producers capitalizing on celebrity. After all, competition is the name of the game in commercial industries. On an even deeper level, however, participants especially appreciated when a celebrity choice attracts completely new audiences to the theatre who might not otherwise have attended at all. As Edwards said, “Whenever you bring a new

\textsuperscript{151} Andrews and Van Dyke starred in the Disney film version of *Mary Poppins*
audience in, you kind of can’t complain about it” (Personal communication, August 15, 2010).

Associate Director of Marketing for Roundabout Theatre Company, Tom O’Connor, takes no major issue with the use of celebrity on Broadway, because of its potential to engage new audiences:

I think that we should stop lamenting the whole use of stars on Broadway as much as we do, because a lot of the time, I think that people go and see a show that’s going to teach them something, and they’re tricked into it by the fact that there’s a star in it. And they learn something… And they walk out changed by a message that came across to them in the show because they were so engaged in it. And I think that is a good thing…. We just need to get them in the door. (Personal communication, August 4, 2010)

Hilary Hamilton, Associate General Manager for three currently running musicals produced by Fran and Barry Weissler, described one particularly successful casting choice on this front:

We had Usher play Billy Flynn [in Chicago\textsuperscript{152}]… He’s such a consummate song and dance man that he did amazing things with that role. And we expanded the singing and expanded the dancing for him, and he brought the house down. And he brought in a whole new audience to the show, an urban audience that would have never normally come to see Chicago—or even see theatre at all… It was like a rock concert. It was amazing. And there was a huge, you know, rush at the box office, but also a rush for everybody on stage, because the energy that was coming back from the audience was just amazing during that period of time that he was in the show. (Personal communication, February 2, 2011)

\textsuperscript{152} Chicago is a musical by John Kander and Fred Ebb, with a book by Ebb and Bob Fosse, and is based on the 1926 play of the same name by Maurine Dallas Watkins. The story is a satire on the concept of “celebrity criminals” and the corruption in the criminal justice system of the prohibition era.
Jack Lane, Executive Producer of Stages St. Louis, a regional theatre that presents exclusively musicals, also sees the value described above. However, he also finds the use of celebrity to attract new audiences potentially challenging for audience development across the canon of musical theatre:

To see a whole different audience in there is a good thing. But here’s the big question: How do you take the audience that’s going to Rock of Ages and try to coddle them/convince them that that magnificent production of South Pacific\(^{153}\)… is something that is as vital and as central as it was—and maybe even more so with this new, incredible production—as it was when it first opened [in 1949]? That’s one of the biggest challenges, I think. (J. Lane, personal communication, August 21, 2010)

Wollman (2002) expresses this concern even more succinctly when she says, “In an atmosphere in which the best-selling theatrical productions are big-budget spectacles, a question arises as to exactly what type of new audience is being created for the theatre” (p. 459).

“Critic-Proofing”

While theatrical reviews in publications such as The New York Times, New York Post, and Variety were once capable of “making or breaking” a Broadway production, the opinion of respected theatre critics has come to matter less and less in the last ten years. This was briefly alluded to earlier with those two innovative and promising musical productions, The Scottsboro Boys and

\(^{153}\) In 2008, Lincoln Center Theater presented a highly acclaimed revival of South Pacific. The production closed in 2010.
Yank!, that were unable to sustain a commercial audience despite receiving favorable reviews.

Wollman (2002) describes the increased use of commercial production elements and marketing techniques as one way that producers are now able to “critic-proof” the theatre (p. 453). Moreover, the climate and role for the professional theatre critic has changed because the internet has made it possible for any theatergoer to become an amateur critic and broadcast their opinion about a show (Isherwood, 2011), and reality television’s encouragement of the public to vote via telephone on shows like American Idol has further modified whose critical voice is most valued (W. Lawson, personal communication, April 29, 2011). As theatre historian Ken Mandelbaum describes it, “‘There has never been a bigger divergence between critical opinion and public opinion. In my entire lifetime, probably never in the history of musicals, have shows gotten such bad reviews and been so wildly popular’” (quoted in Wollman, 2002, p. 452).

One recent example can be found in The Addams Family. The New York Times review previously cited above (as well as every other major publication) not just disliked, but panned The Addams Family. Additionally, the show did not receive a single Tony Award—historically, another stamp of approval for theatergoers. Yet, it is still one of the top-selling Broadway musicals at the moment. Greisler described the phenomenon in this way: “In terms of a producing standpoint, it’s a genius concept. And it’s a real shame that the show [The Addams Family] is not very good... The title and those two actors [it stars
Nathan Lane and Bebe Neuwirth\textsuperscript{154} are bankable commodities, that no matter what critics say, people will go” (Personal communication, March 20, 2010).

Grenz related his shock at the incredibly enthusiastic audience response when he attended a performance of \textit{The Addams Family}, which he personally found to be underwhelming. Grenz said that the production contained “the greatest [theatrical] sin there is: I was bored” (Personal communication, July 24, 2010). Despite his own boredom, Grenz said the audience leapt to their feet at the conclusion of this particular performance, and he hypothesized that this is owed to the fact that they paid so much money for their tickets and needed to convince themselves that it was worth the money. As quoted in Wienir and Langley (2004), television actor Jason Alexander agrees with Grenz: “’In the last ten years, I can’t remember going to a show and not seeing a standing ovation. Audiences will stand for anything. It is sort of like they are telling themselves they had an amazing time by standing up and applauding’” (p. 160).

O’Connor relates the following similar personal story about one recent Broadway production he was involved in:

There were people standing up every night at \textit{Bye Bye Birdie}\textsuperscript{155}. It got some of the worst reviews I’ve ever experienced in my entire career, and there were people that went there and saw it and were thinking, ‘Oh, God, this was a lot of fun!’ This was, like, their Broadway show they went to see on their school break, and so they wanted to love it that much. And they did… You’ll never hear a tourist say, ‘Oh,

\textsuperscript{154} Neuwirth is an actress, singer, and dancer best known popularly for her portrayal of the character Lilith on the comedy series \textit{Cheers} and its spin-off, \textit{Frasier}.

\textsuperscript{155} In 2009, Roundabout Theatre Company produced a revival of this 1960 musical, starring television actor John Stamos and film actress Gina Gershon. The revival closed in 2010.
that book has problems’… They don’t think things like that… You’re looking at, ‘Did I have a good time? Did they remember their lines? And did I feel like I saw a Broadway show?’” (Personal communication, August 4, 2010)

Instead of such meager requirements for standing ovations, most participants expressed a longing for a higher standard of excellence: artistic integrity.

Artistic Integrity

Every participant was able to cite instances when the use of celebrity on Broadway was artistically successful, in addition to attracting audiences. They were also able to cite situations in which it was some hybrid of the two (or neither of the two), and they had many astute observations and opinions about why certain celebrity-utilizing productions were more artistically successful while also being financially successful.

When It Is Successful

Half of the individual interview participants, as well as the focus group, were quick to bring up some variation on the phrase, “Celebrities are celebrities for a reason.” In the words of director Jen Bender, most recently represented on Broadway as the Resident Director of The Lion King and Assistant Director of The Wedding Singer:

People who are famous are famous for a reason… There’s a lot to be said for, like, a type of charisma that you can’t teach. And that’s what celebrities have, and they’re celebrities because of that thing… I’m not so down on celebrity casting, because I just feel that people are celebrities for a reason. Like, I’d be pissed off if someone

156 The Wedding Singer is a 2006 musical based on the 1998 film of the same name. The music is by Matthew Sklar, the lyrics are by Chad Beguelin, and the book is by Tim Herlihy.
cast Snooki\textsuperscript{157} in a show, but, like, Snooki doesn’t have talent. (Personal communication, August 12, 2010)

Huff agrees with Bender about the exciting atmosphere that talented celebrities can bring to the table:

It’s something I’ve noticed in being in the business about meeting celebrities and meeting people from Hollywood. There is something different about them. I won’t lie... There’s a reason why they become a star or why they are a star... It’s kind of an ‘X factor’ thing that you can’t really teach someone. (Personal communication, August 5, 2010)

The most cited example by participants of successful celebrity casting was that of country singer Reba Mcintyre’s stint as Annie Oakley in Annie Get Your Gun\textsuperscript{158}. In the words of composer David Nehls, writer of The Great American Trailer Park Musical\textsuperscript{159}:

She [Annie Oakley] really was a country girl, is what she was. And then you bring in this woman, Reba Mcintyre, who is really very natural. She’s just a natural person, you know, when you meet her. She’s very normal. And that’s kind of what Annie Get Your Gun is centered around, this very natural, normal, kind of awkward fish out of water. And it just fit. And her singing was terrific. You know, she’s got a great voice. And she gave a natural flavor to the piece that wasn’t there before [McIntyre took over role\textsuperscript{160}]. (Personal communication, January 31, 2011)

\textsuperscript{157} Nicole “Snooki” Polizzi is a reality television celebrity who appears on the MTV reality show Jersey Shore.

\textsuperscript{158} Annie Get Your Gun is a musical with lyrics and music by Irving Berlin and a book by Herbert Fields and Dorothy Fields. The story is a fictionalized version of the life of sharpshooter Annie Oakley. It originally appeared on Broadway in 1946 and was most recently revived in 1999.

\textsuperscript{159} The Great American Trailer Park Musical played Off-Broadway in 2005.

\textsuperscript{160} McIntyre was a one of various replacement actresses in the role. Bernadette Peters originated the role in this revival production.
Another frequently cited example was 3rd Season American Idol winner Fantasia Barrino playing Celie in the stage musical The Color Purple\textsuperscript{161}. Barrino has publicly stated that she had her share of struggles in life (being a teen mother, coming from poverty, etc.), and these personal struggles paralleled the struggles of Celie in The Color Purple. Huff, the casting director who initially suggested Barrino’s name to the show’s producers, said this of her performance: “They re-reviewed the show [The Color Purple], and you would have thought they re-wrote the show, based on what people thought of it after they saw her [Barrino] in it, versus when they saw it originally when it opened with LaChanze\textsuperscript{162}” (Personal communication, August 5, 2010).

Less-cited by participants, but also a popular example of successful celebrity casting, was actress Melanie Griffith in Chicago:

In Chicago, we do bring in interesting celebrities, but we do it in a way because they bring something—or we hope or think that they’re going to bring something—interesting to the character. You know, we had Melanie Griffith in the show, who certainly is not a singer or a dancer by any means, but she brought a vulnerability to the character of Roxy Hart... And though we really had to adjust the singing and dancing of that part for her, she brought so much to the character in the acting that it paid off. (H. Hamilton, personal communication, February 2, 2011)

The recurring element that makes these celebrity casting choices successful, according to participants, is that there is some kind of associational

\textsuperscript{161} The Color Purple is a 2005 musical based on the novel of the same name by Alice Walker. It features music and lyrics by Brenda Russell, Allee Willis, and Stephen Bray, with a book by Marsha Norman.

\textsuperscript{162} LaChanze is a seasoned Broadway actress who originated the role of Celie in the musical, winning a Tony Award for her performance.
connection for the audience between the celebrity and the character they are playing, in combination with genuine talent. In the case of Chicago, many of their celebrity casting choices have worked so well because of the inherent nature of the show: In the words of producer Barry Wiessler (2010), “Chicago celebrates entertainment through entertainment… [T]he show explores and exploits the culture of celebrity, which is as relevant, if not more so, today as it was in the ‘90s when we brought Chicago to Broadway” (p. 26).

In terms of celebrity source material, participants cited the musical Jersey Boys\textsuperscript{163} as the best example of an artistically successful and financially successful show of this type, mainly because of its narrative structure. That is to say, the musical takes a compelling narrative and supplements that narrative with popular music that logically comes out of the story; the narrative is not loosely contrived to accommodate the music (J. Redish, personal communication, February 5, 2011). In situations such as this, most participants believe that there are many instances when celebrity source material can be artistically successful as musical theatre. As Grenz put it, “I'm not willing to dismiss either the jukebox musical or the movie musical, because there are good examples of each. So if they can be done well, it’s done well… Jane Eyre\textsuperscript{164} may be higher art than

\textsuperscript{163} Jersey Boys is a 2005 musical that uses the music of the 1960s group the Four Seasons to tell the story of that group's rise to fame.

\textsuperscript{164} Jane Eyre is a musical that opened on Broadway in 2000, with music and lyrics by Paul Gordon and a book by John Caird. It is based on the novel of the same name by Charlotte Brontë.
Xanadu\textsuperscript{165}, but ultimately, \textit{Xanadu was the better stage musical}” (Personal communication, July 24, 2010).

\textbf{When It Fails}

Unfortunately, the drive for Broadway to be as commercially viable as possible can often supplant artistically appropriate choices:

\begin{quote}
It literally comes down to a business decision… It’s about the melding of two things: Someone who can help get you press—maybe they’re not selling tickets, but they’ll help get you press—and then it’s about, can they do the role? (J. Huff, personal communication, August 5, 2010)
\end{quote}

One immediately notes the order in which Huff lists these requirements and, also, that the celebrity be able to just “do” the role, not be great in the role. Redish reiterates these priorities of producers: “I think there’s artistic \textit{intention}. I know a lot of Broadway producers, and they love the art of it. But when it comes down to it, the numbers sort of take over… It’s not easy to produce. It’s easy to put someone big in a show and sell tickets” (Personal communication, February 5, 2011).

This ambition to make as much money as possible sometimes leads to what Redish calls a “creative blight” on a production (Personal communication, February 5, 2011). Two celebrity casting examples most often cited by participants as being this kind of blight were television actor David Hasselhoff’s

\begin{footnote}
\textit{Xanadu} is a 2007 musical with a book by Douglas Carter Beane and music and lyrics by Jeff Lynne and John Farrar. It is based on the 1980 cult classic film of the same name.
\end{footnote}
appearance in *Jekyll & Hyde* and film and television actress Gina Gershon’s appearance in *Bye Bye Birdie*. By all accounts, both were not just mediocre, but terrible in their roles, bringing the entire quality of the productions down. In reference to Hasselhoff’s performance, Eddie Curry—Producer and Casting Director at Beef and Boards Dinner Theatre in Indianapolis, Indiana—had this to say: “That’s what cheapens it. Right there. When you do that just to get that name on the marquee, that cheapens the whole practice… I think it’s best left to people who know what they’re doing” (Personal communication, February 21, 2010).

According to participants, the blight can also spread to musicals that rely on celebrity source material, such as using popular music. When the musical becomes merely a reason to string songs that people know together—as some might say *Rock of Ages* does, for example—the art of theatrical storytelling is lost. A rock concert feeling, such as the one that Hamilton described above around Usher’s performance in *Chicago*, replaces it. In an interview that recently appeared in *American Theatre* magazine, composer Stephen Sondheim described this kind of musical theatre in the following way: “It’s very unpopular to say, but I don’t think that rock lends itself to theatre, to storytelling. It lends itself to concerts, and that’s what a lot of musicals are today: concerts” (Weinert-Kendt, 2011, p. 27).

---

*166 Jekyll & Hyde* is a 1997 musical based on *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson. The music is by Frank Wildhorn, and the lyrics and book are by Leslie Bricusse.
Haak also criticized this type of theatre by saying, “If it’s being chosen only because it’s known to people and not because a writer or a producer thinks there’s a message worth sharing… then I think that’s a real problem” (Personal communication, September 4, 2010). Grenz more tersely described the situation by saying that musicals like *Rock of Ages* are “the theatrical equivalent of date rape” (Personal communication, July 24, 2010).

Redish articulated how the importance of storytelling in musical theatre relates to the often less-than-stellar musical theatre adaption of another type of celebrity source material, popular films:

> With regards to film: Film, at this point, is part of our cultural narrative… What people don’t realize when they spend bajillions millions of dollars on a film [adapted into a musical] is that there are some stories that are better suited for film. And you have to ask yourself really hard, ‘Is this piece a musical? Does this narrative sing?’ There are so many movies that get adapted that are… satisfying movies—deeply satisfying, complete narratives… No one really thinks they can improve upon that narrative with a musical; they think, ‘People will like this title,’ I think. And they’re probably right. But what you really want to do, if you really want to do really good business, is look at a movie that people like that’s just sort of so-so and that can be improved or enhanced by the stage, because that is ultimately what’s going to really survive…. Look, I will go on record: I think *Legally Blonde*[^167] is a very satisfying movie, right? It’s a complete narrative… I like a lot of things in the musical[^168] a lot… I think it was just better served by a movie… There are things that musicals do better, and those are the things that we should stick to. (Personal communication, February 5, 2011)

[^167]: *Legally Blonde* is a 2001 comedy film.
[^168]: The 2007 musical *Legally Blonde* is based on the 2001 film and has music and lyrics by Laurence O’Keefe and Nell Benjamin and a book by Heather Hach.
Commercial producer and current Director of Development for MCC Theater in New York City, Erica Lynn Schwartz, can relate to Redish’s sentiments:

For me, when *The Wedding Singer*, the musical, came out, I remembered that movie. That was very much an our generation movie. And I remember one scene started [during the musical]... and it put me right into the movie. The same thing happened when I saw *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*, the musical\(^{169}\)—I remembered seeing the movie... At one point during *The Wedding Singer* [the musical], I started laughing. And my friend next to me was like, ‘Why are you laughing?’ And I was like, ‘Oh, because I remember what’s coming next, and this is such a funny scene.’ In the *movie* it was a funny scene. In the [stage] show, it really fell on its face, in my opinion. (Personal communication, August 17, 2010)

Beyond the artistic ideals of the theatre industry, the major problem with these creative blights, as Redish calls them, is that participants feel audiences should be getting better quality for the incredible money they pay to see Broadway shows:

As an audience member, if I’m spending a hundred-some-odd dollars a ticket, and I’m a family of four, and I’m coming from out of town, and we’re going to go have dinner, and we have to park in the city or we’re taking the train, and my kids want to go to M&M World\(^{170}\), and all that stuff—just to see *The Addams Family*—it costs me a thousand dollars for one day. And, now, what I hate about that is *The Addams Family* is not very good, so it was a thousand dollars to have crap. (T. Greisler, personal communication, March 20, 2010)

---

\(^{169}\) *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels* is a 2005 musical based on the film of the same name. The music and lyrics are by David Yazbek, and the book is by Jeffrey Lane.

\(^{170}\) This is a reference to the retail store M&M’s World in the Times Square area.
Humility Matters

Generally, participants (and perhaps audiences too) are more willing to accept a bit of artistic compromise in exchange for the popular appeal of a celebrity if they feel that the celebrity has approached their work on Broadway from a place of respect, humility, and hard work. The marketing for Disney Channel actor Corbin Bleu’s Broadway debut in *In the Heights*\(^{171}\) subtly capitalized on this fact. Note his gracious posture in the image that follows:

![Figure 4.3: Corbin Bleu in *In the Heights*, Richard Rodgers Theatre (Personal photograph by author, March 2010)](image)

In the words of Curry, Bleu’s outstretched right hand with his left hand over his heart says, “‘I am not bigger than this piece’… and that’s brilliant marketing right there.” (Personal communication, February 21, 2010).

\(^{171}\) *In the Heights* is an original musical with music and lyrics by Lin-Manuel Miranda and a book by Quiara Alegría Hudes. The show opened on Broadway in 2008.
Former *American Idol* contestant Constantine Maroulis has received favorable reviews for his performance in *Rock of Ages* on Broadway and, now, on tour. In addition to having talent, it is clear that Maroulis respects the opportunity he has been given: “I grew up in the theatre... so I understand the progression and the hard work involved and am not afraid to do what it takes to work my way up, like from ensemble to leading role when you are a Broadway guy... It’s a blue collar mentality. It’s about the job and not the bull!” (quoted in Lawrence, 2009, p. 48). The theatre community is, on the whole, more willing to take humble celebrities, like Bleu and Maroulis, into their ranks:

You know, I do give these celebrities credit for taking it on, for even wanting to be so vulnerable to be on stage in front of a live audience... All of these stars have said it’s like the hardest thing they’ve ever done, in terms of the discipline that it takes. And, you know, then on top of that, they realize that people are paying to see them—that they have a responsibility to the paying audience, to the rest of the people involved in the production. And when they get that, and when they take that all very seriously, it’s an amazing experience. (H. Hamilton, personal communication, February 2, 2011)

The Marginalization of Musical Theatre Artists

According to participants, however, they do not frequently sense that celebrities do have the same respect for the theatre that they, as individuals who have devoted their careers to the discipline, have. Despite this fact, celebrities are often treated better, paid more, and held to a lower artistic standard than non-celebrity theatre artists. Devoted musical theatre artists are demoralized by this fact and feel that their work has increasingly become insignificant.
The Greatest Artists You Never Knew

In an email exchange about the topic of my research with composer Stephen Flaherty, who has been quite prolific and popular in musical theatre in the recent past, he shared the following personal connection to the topic of celebrity on Broadway:

We felt it last season when our Ragtime\textsuperscript{172} revival... wasn’t able to find a sustainable audience on Broadway. We had an expert ensemble cast of the most talented singing actors in the musical theater today. What we didn’t have was a ‘name’—we didn’t have Catherine Zeta-Jones\textsuperscript{173} like our neighbor, A Little Night Music\textsuperscript{174}. Our notices were very strong, and we weren’t able to get through winter, unfortunately. Sign of the times. (Personal communication, January 27, 2011)

Figure 4.4: Catherine Zeta-Jones in A Little Night Music, Walter Kerr Theatre (Personal photograph by author, March 2010)

\textsuperscript{172} Ragtime is a 1998 Broadway musical with music by Stephen Flaherty, lyrics by Lynn Ahrens, and a book by Terrence McNally. It is based on the novel by E. L. Doctorow. The musical was revived on Broadway in 2009, but the revival closed after only 28 previews and 65 performances.

\textsuperscript{173} Catherine Zeta-Jones is an Oscar-winning film actress.

\textsuperscript{174} A Little Night Music is a 1973 musical with music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim and a book by Hugh Wheeler. It was revived on Broadway in 2009, and that production closed in early 2011.
Catherine Zeta-Jones took home the Tony Award for “Best Actress in a Musical" that year. On June 13, 2010, I watched the Tony Award broadcast with a group of theatre industry professionals in an apartment in Queens, New York. Each of the 26 Tony categories had at least one show nominated that was utilizing celebrity in some capacity, and in many cases, those were the shows that won the Tony Awards. Although this was related to non-musical Broadway productions, it seems worth noting that in the case of the award for “Best Actor in a Play,” every single nominee was a film star (Jude Law, Alfred Molina, Liev Schreiber, Christopher Walken, and Denzel Washington). When this category came up, one fellow viewer blurted out, “They should rename the award 'Best Movie Star in a Play!'”

For some Americans, their only exposure to the Broadway community is through watching the annual Tony Award broadcast. The Tony Awards are something that has, historically, belonged uniquely to the theatre community, which has allowed them the opportunity to be seen on a national platform. When the overwhelming presence of Hollywood at the 2010 Tony Awards was brought up, participant and professional stage, television, and film actress Lauren “Coco” Cohn said with dismay, “They can bring them [the celebrities] in, but they didn’t have to win [Tony Awards]” (Personal communication, August 15, 2010). There is certainly the sense that Broadway no longer belongs to theatre people.

And it is not just actors who are marginalized by the celebrity trend. Haak has previously worked directly with popular musician-turned-Broadway composer
Elton John, who is currently represented on Broadway with the musical *Billy Elliot*. Haak described the frequent need to silence his own artistic instincts as a music director to accommodate John during their collaboration:

> In the case of someone like Elton John, I think that he was initially brought into our world solely because of his celebrity… In Elton’s case, he also, in various ways, wound up to be really good at doing what he does. He had lots of missteps. Certainly the show I did with him [*Lestat*] was a huge misstep. And along the way, there are the most unbelievable amounts of places where you need to defer to him in a way that you know is not the artistically correct choice, and you have to do it because he is who he is. (Personal communication, September 4, 2010)

---

*Figure 4.5: Elton John’s *Billy Elliot*, Imperial Theatre (Personal photograph by author, March 2010)*

---

175 *Billy Elliot* is a 2008 Broadway musical based on the film of the same name. The music is by Elton John, and book and lyrics are by Lee Hall, who also wrote the film’s screenplay.

176 *Lestat* is a 2006 Broadway musical inspired by Anne Rice’s *The Vampire Chronicles*. The music is by Elton John, the lyrics are by Bernie Taupin, and the book is by Linda Woolverton. The Broadway production ran for only 33 previews and 39 performances.
Entrepreneur Jed Cohen, who co-founded the crowdfunding website RocketHub.com,\(^{177}\) described the danger of this across-the-board artist marginalization in the following way:

> You know, we haven’t had a star composer of the ilk of, you know, Leonard Bernstein\(^{178}\), Stephen Sondheim, Ahrens and Flaherty pop up in this generation yet. I think the closest we’ve gotten is Jason Robert Brown\(^{179}\). But, even so, we haven’t seen him attain the same level of success. So it sort of begs the question of, you know, is that totally gone? Is there really the possibility of a new, talented composer showing up, really grabbing us, and attaining the same level of success? And the answer is, I’m not sure. I don’t know that it’s possible any more. (Personal communication, August 13, 2010)

As professional actor and arts career coach Leo Ash Evens points out, the problem is not that there are less musical theatre composers than there were in the past; the problem is that they have no hope of being produced without some kind of celebrity tie-in (Personal communication, August 15, 2010).

Multiple participants described their desire to get work in the television industry as actors, directors, and writers—not because it is a medium that they care passionately about, but because they think it will afford them a “cache” in the theatre community that they can use to get the work they actually care about in theatre (J. Bender, personal communication, August 12, 2010). Greisler

\(^{177}\) RocketHub.com is a grassroots online crowdfunding platform for creative projects. “Crowdfunding” refers to the pooling of money and resources together using personal networks (like friends and family), usually via the internet, to support an effort.

\(^{178}\) The American composer and conductor who wrote the music for the musicals West Side Story, Candide, Wonderful Town, and On the Town (among many other compositions).

\(^{179}\) An American musical theatre composer and lyricist of, most notably, the 1998 Broadway musical Parade and the 2008 Broadway musical 13.
described these struggles that musical theatre artists face to get noticed within a celebrity-driven culture:

There were some people who, when I spoke to them when they went to these auditions [for American Idol], were like, ‘Hey, I’ve been working so hard to become a Broadway star, if anything, just getting on that show [American Idol] is a ticket into rooms that I otherwise would not have gotten into… All I have to do is even be seen on that show in some capacity, and then I can become an American Idol reject or an American Idol contestant who didn’t make it to the top two and become a Broadway star.’ (Personal communication, March 20, 2010)

It does, indeed, seem much easier for television, film, and music industry celebrities to get work on Broadway in creative capacities. For this reason, many participants feel that working on a Broadway show has become no more than a “fun time” for celebrities, which further degrades and marginalizes the work that theatre artists do and the effort they put into their work to make a decent living for themselves.

Camp Broadway

In the words of actor Matt Leisy, who is currently appearing in The Fantasticks Off-Broadway, “What I think is really annoying is that, like, mentality of people in Hollywood: They’re like, ‘Oh, I’m going to do Broadway.’ It’s like summer camp for them… ‘I’m going to rough it.’ And then, meanwhile, roughing it to them is earning, like, 10,000 or more a week” (Personal communication, August 15, 2010). Greisler echoed this frustration when he spoke of Corbin Bleu’s run in In the Heights: “What is the ‘unfair’ aspect of that is that Corbin Bleu
was going to get work. Corbin Bleu was going to do just fine. Corbin Bleu didn’t need to be on Broadway” (Personal communication, March 20, 2010).

A recent episode of The Tonight Show with Jay Leno further illustrates why musical theatre artists feel this frustration, and it shows how the general public (such as those that watch The Tonight Show with Jay Leno) may get the impression that celebrities are, universally, deserving of Broadway because of their celebrity status. During Leno’s interview with television actress Kirstie Alley, she told the following story:

I really want to do Broadway… And so anyway, I signed up to do Dancing with the Stars180… So then I talked to John [Travolta]181, and I said, ‘Look, I just signed up for Dancing with the Stars because I want to do Broadway.’ And he goes, ‘Oh, honey, I could have just made a call and gotten you a play right now.’ I was like, ‘What?’ ‘Yeah, same guys who did Hairspray182—they’d love you.’ So, anyway, I’m doing it [Dancing with the Stars] anyway. And maybe those guys that did Hairspray will see me dance. (2011, March 24)183

Hamilton provided support that this is, indeed, a semi-accurate depiction of how easy it is for many celebrities to get a Broadway show when she described Usher’s and Melanie Griffith’s motivations for doing Chicago.

It was just something he [Usher] has always wanted to do [be on Broadway]. And so he comes, and we offer him this role [Billy Flynn in Chicago]. And he comes in for eight

---

180 The ABC television dancing competition, in which the contestant pairs consist of celebrities paired with a professional dancers.
181 Travolta is a film star who appeared in the 2007 film version of the musical Hairspray.
182 Hairspray is a 2002 musical with music by Marc Shaiman, lyrics by Shaiman and Scott Wittman, and a book by Mark O’Donnell and Thomas Meehan. It is based on the 1988 John Waters film of the same name. A new version of the film was made in 2007, based on the stage musical.
183 View the video of this interview at: http://www.hulu.com/watch/226980/the-tonight-show-with-jay-leno-kirstie-alley-part-2
weeks, which is a rather short amount of time in his life. And for him, it’s a lark. And it’s another feather in his cap… Melanie Griffith, quite honestly, did it [Chicago] because her husband [Antonio Banderas\textsuperscript{184}] was appearing in \textit{Nine}\textsuperscript{185} across the street. And she thought that would be fun. (Personal communication, February 2, 2011)

According to Huff, sometimes celebrities do not even have to audition for the shows they are cast in. In the case of Fantasia Barrino, she was offered the role of Celie in \textit{The Color Purple} before the producers or creative team had ever heard her sing or read for the role. When asked what would have happened if Barrino had not been up to snuff, Huff responded, “They [the producers of \textit{The Color Purple}] were going to figure out how to make it work” (Personal communication, August 5, 2010). Fortunately for them, it did work out in this case. Still, stories like this one are not inspiring to artists who have worked their entire life to be on Broadway and to make a living in the theatre.

\textit{Hard Work Does Not Pay}

As Hamilton mentioned in a previous quote, Melanie Griffith’s appearance in \textit{Chicago} required the adjustment of the singing and the dancing of the role of Roxy Hart to accommodate the celebrity actress. Such accommodation is not an uncommon occurrence with celebrity casting:

\begin{quote}
You know, we do do work sessions with everybody, and there are big names that just don’t work out. So, you know, not everybody gets a shot at it. But if we think that there’s something there, we have an amazing team of people who work with these people, who literally teach people how to
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{184} Banderas is a high-profile Spanish film actor.
\textsuperscript{185} \textit{Nine} is a 1982 musical with music and lyrics by Maury Yeston and a book by Arthur Kopit. The story is based on Federico Fellini’s film \\textit{8½}. The musical was revived on Broadway in 2003.
They teach people how to breathe. They teach them how to make tone. They, you know, teach them technique, because they're not professionals, by any means... They have to have something to work with, but by no means do they have to be professional. We can teach them how to do all of this stuff. (H. Hamilton, personal communication, February 2, 2011)

The special attention and treatment that celebrities receive on this and other levels is discouraging to many musical theatre artists, especially when the celebrity is not “enough” of a star to really make a significant difference at the box office. Nehls recounted an illustrative example pertaining to the Off-Broadway production of his musical The Great American Trailer Park Musical:

We had a phenomenal group of actors who did the NYMF festival. They were the people who were handpicked by myself and Betsy [Kelso, the co-writer]... And none of them got cast [in the Off-Broadway production], except for one. And it was one of the hardest situations, sitting there in casting and looking at people that are famous... and you're just like, ‘I don’t see it’... I think it absolutely hurt the show... It was a favored nations contract, where everybody got paid the same. But there was one particular person—who I know I did not want cast and was forced upon me—who was the big name... Even though it was a favored nations contract, part of our budget went to bringing this person from out of town, housing him and his family, and providing private school for his kid... There was another very, very popular Broadway person who was originally cast in one of the roles, who is also a good friend of mine, and all she had asked for was some, I think it was, money for babysitting. And she didn't get it... And, you know, I don't think it translated into ticket sales. I don't think people came to see that show because of the names that were attached to it. (Personal communication, January 31, 2011)

The New York Musical Theatre Festival (NYMF) is an annual three-week festival that presents more than thirty new musicals at venues in New York City's midtown Theater District.
Another example of the great heights scaled to cater to a “name” that will not likely make much difference at the box office is found in television actress Jenna Elfman’s scheduled appearance in the musical *Nine*, as recounted by Arvia:

Basically, Roundabout [Roundabout Theatre Company, the producer of *Nine*] said to me, ‘What’s your schedule? We want you to come in and rehearse with her [Jenna Elfman] six days a week and give her a voice lesson before rehearsals… We will pay you whatever. Just invoice us’… For a month, I went in six days a week and worked with Jenna, and she worked very hard… She was already signed, and then she went in and sang for them, and she sang ‘Simple’ [from the show]. And she said, ‘Between it going so abominably and the emotional content of the song, I was sobbing by the end of it. And I turned to them and said, ‘If you want to rip up my contract right now, I understand.’’ Because she acknowledged, ‘I can’t do it.’ And they said, ‘No, no. It'll be fine.’ I said to the parties involved after the fact [when Jenna walked away], ‘Shame on you for thinking that anybody can do what we do and that anybody can be taught in five weeks what we spend a lifetime training to do. How dare you.’ (Personal communication, August 15, 2010)

Other participants related similar personal anecdotes about the ease with which celebrities are granted access to Broadway and how the special treatment those celebrities are given effects the other parties involved:

A friend of mine is in a Broadway show, and there’s a star in it who dabbled in the theatre… I think it permeated backstage. It was very negative. There was a lot of, like, drug use and, like, L.A. thing happening backstage at a Broadway house. And I think it might poison the air a little bit, is what I’m sort of reading. If you have someone in your midst who just doesn’t respect the theatre, people who do respect the theatre will become easily dissatisfied… I guess this person [the celebrity] would say, ‘Oh, just give me my

---

187 Elfman backed out of doing the show during final rehearsals.
Tony and let me get out of here,' or something… I think it makes people feel sort of disheartened. (J. Redish, personal communication, February 5, 2011)

Incidentally, this actress did get her Tony. Here is another version of this story:

They [the producers] brought in Christy Carlson Romano\textsuperscript{188} [into \textit{Beauty and the Beast}]… No craft whatsoever. She couldn’t sing it. She sang it in four voices, cracked, yodeled, vocal failure… All six months she was there: sold out. Not a seat to be had. And every performance, people stood and cheered her, which completely demoralized the company… The rest of the show went to bloody hell because everybody else is just like, ‘I’ve trained years. I’ve spent tens of thousands of dollars. Fifteen of my friends would kill to have this job.’ (A. Arvia, personal communication, August 15, 2010)

Professional actor Brian Golub, who has worked extensively in theatre and also in film, has had experience in this area too:

I just finished this terrible reading\textsuperscript{189}. It’s called \textit{Go West: The Village People Musical}… There was a celebrity director… Jamie King. He, like, directs Madonna’s tour. He does concert tours, but this is his first Broadway thing… All these producers are coming in… This is how they [the creative team] greeted us: ‘It’s not about anybody here. They [the producers] just want to see the script. So you guys are basically here just to read it’… Everybody in that rehearsal process for ten days was like, ‘Well, none of us are going to be in this thing [after this reading]. They’re going to get celebrities… Well, why are we even putting in our energy for ten days?’… He [the director] literally said—this killed me—he said, ‘When this show goes to Broadway and we \textit{all go to see it together}… this is going to be cheesy, but I just want you to hold onto this moment, because we’re the first people to put this thing up’… That’s the energy that’s given to a

\textsuperscript{188} The Disney Channel actress best known for her role on \textit{Even Stevens} and as the voice of the title character on \textit{Kim Possible}.

\textsuperscript{189} A reading refers to when a piece of theatre is performed not to be seen but to be heard (without production elements), often as a presentation to producers for a potential future full scale production.
group of people who are trying to do something for a show to move it forward. (Personal communication, August 15, 2010)

Evens summed up the general feeling of all these stories well:

I think that’s what I find the most frustrating: It’s that for what I believed in and trained in and still have so much passion about, which is the craft of theatre, a lot of the time will always be second on the list... So I think what it’s doing is it’s forcing all actors in New York City to really ask themselves bigger questions, which is, what kind of work do they want to do? And that might mean it’s not in New York City. (Personal communication, August 15, 2010)

Nice Work If You Can Get It

Over half the participants in this research admitted that while celebrity elements may sometimes hurt a show artistically or in terms of morale, celebrity is often what keeps a show running and the many people involved in the production employed:

I think actors come to New York with a naïve perception of what New York really is—like, what Broadway is. And I think that has to do with…. just that little voice in us. When we first saw Broadway shows are when we all said, ‘Oh, man, I want to be that. I want to do that.’ To really know what the reality of New York City is... I think that’s part of it too... It feels personal, but it’s business. (L. A. Evens, personal communication, August 15, 2010)

As Hamilton put it: “If you’re smart, you realize that this person [a celebrity] is keeping my show open and keeping me employed and allowing me to practice my craft, and it’s just a reality, you know. This is what it takes” (Personal communication, February 2, 2011).

Broadway actress Marissa Jaret Winokur, as quoted in Wienir and Langley (2004), provides a specific example: “At one point during [the 1994
revival of] *Grease!*, the show was about the close. Then, Lucy Lawless\textsuperscript{190} came in and we sold out for three months. That meant that we had jobs for three months. I was grateful when she came’” (p. 157). Greisler added to this argument about extending the longevity of productions, and therefore employment for the theatre community, when he pointed out that celebrity replacement actors can even generate repeat business for a production; people who have already seen a production are sometimes interested in seeing it again because of a new celebrity’s attachment to it (Personal communication, March 20, 2010).

Redish sees some of these productions that capitalize on celebrity as opportunities for artists to make enough money to enjoy a better standard of living: “I think some of these pieces have allowed for people to live lifestyles they wouldn’t have otherwise, and I think that’s a huge gift. I think that’s a huge gift to the artistic community” (Personal communication, February 5, 2011). However, it is also possible that certain power-celebrity casting has the opposite effect on the potential longevity of a production—that is, when the star power that comes to be associated with the production becomes unrepeateable.

Replacing the Irreplaceable

The hardest thing about working with stars is nobody wants to replace a star… A lot of times when you make a lot out of star power in a show, you’re limiting yourself, because you can never get back to that star power [once they leave the production]… It’s very tricky once you, kind of, plan your entire strategy around a star to then be able to move away from that star. (E. L. Schwartz, personal communication, August 17, 2010)

\textsuperscript{190} The television actress most famous for her role on the series *Xena: Warrior Princess*. 
Hamilton provides a recent example of this challenge that Schwartz prefers to avoid:

A show like Promises, Promises\textsuperscript{191}—it was produced on the shoulders of Sean Hayes\textsuperscript{192} and Kristin Chenoweth\textsuperscript{193}. When they couldn’t replace them, they [the producers] closed the show… It’s so hard to be in a position where people are buying tickets to see a particular person, but that particular person won’t, you know, be in the show forever. And then what do you do? … The audiences today are coming to expect a name… More and more shows are relying so much on stars to sell them that, you know, you wind up in a position where you can’t re-cast. And then what do you do with your show? (Personal communication, February 2, 2011)

Figure 4.6: Sean Hayes & Kristin Chenoweth in Promises, Promises, Broadway Theatre (Personal photograph by author, March 2010)

\textsuperscript{191} Promises, Promises is a 1968 musical based on the film The Apartment. The music is by Burt Bacharach, the lyrics are by Hal David, and the book is by Neil Simon. The musical was revived on Broadway in 2010.

\textsuperscript{192} The television actor most famous for playing Jack on the sitcom Will & Grace.

\textsuperscript{193} The actress-singer most popularly famous for her Emmy-winning role on the series Pushing Daisies and for originating the role of Glinda in Wicked.
Jack Lane describes a recent situation where popular stars were replaced with new stars known more for their theatrical work than for popular film or television:

When Bernadette Peters and Elaine Stritch were announced [to replace Catherine Zeta-Jones and Angela Lansbury] for *Night Music* [*A Little Night Music*], almost everyone said, ‘Oh, my God! It’s going to sell out.’ Then it got, on the whole, very strong reviews… They [Peters and Stritch] are playing to full houses almost all at discount. That surprised me. I thought once the reviews came out, it was going to go through the roof. It hasn’t. (Personal communication, August 21, 2010)

Patrick Healy (2010) of *The New York Times* calls this challenge that all of the above quotes describe as the “*The Producers* syndrome” (¶ 6). *The Producers* was a smash hit musical when it opened but found that audience enthusiasm waned after the two original stars, Nathan Lane and Matthew Broderick, left the show. In other words, when a celebrity becomes almost the sole identity of the show, the celebrity choice ends up being limiting (see Figures 4.6 and 4.7 and note the prominence of the actors’ images in the advertising for these shows). In fact, it probably hurts the production, which may have had a much longer run without such huge star power attached to it from the start.

---

194 The actress-singer best known for her long and notable musical theatre career.
195 The legendary theatre actress who has recently become more popularly famous for her role on the comedy series *30 Rock*.
The producers of *The Addams Family* have tried to capitalize not just on star headliners but on the Addams Family brand, and they did not feature the images of Nathan Lane and Bebe Neuwirth in their original marketing (see Figure 4.2). Despite this effort, when Nathan Lane took one week of vacation in August 2010, the weekly grosses of the production fell from $1.1 million to $764,231—over a 30% drop (Healy, 2010). Faced with this reality, a *New York Times* article from late 2010 described the production as “furiously seeking stars to replace its leading pair” (Healy, 2010, ¶ 8). They were able to secure television actor Roger Rees (best known to Americans for his role on the television series *Cheers*) and
model-turned-actress Brooke Shields. Time will tell if this attempt to replace the irrereplaceable has worked for this Broadway production or if it too will fall prey to The Producers syndrome.

The Effects On Regional Theatre

The dilemma of how to sell a show that lacks celebrity punch spreads beyond Broadway into the regions as well, because regional theatres often look to Broadway for their future. In the words of Jack Lane, “I think Broadway is always going to be the jumping off point for us [Stages St. Louis] because it is the Mecca for theatre in this world” (Personal communication, August 21, 2010). Hamilton provided an illustrative example of how often regional theatre looks to Broadway, specifically with the Weissler’s production of Chicago:

We control the worldwide rights to Chicago. So any regional theatre—literally, from an elementary school on up to a LORT\(^1\)—has to ask us for permission for the rights to do any number of performances... There must be 75 to 100 requests [for the rights to Chicago] on a weekly basis... Popular is popular. If it’s popular on Broadway, it’s popular in the regions. (Personal communication, February 2, 2011)

The Broadway-Regional Theatre Divide

However, it seems that Chicago might be part of a special small group of recent musicals that are as popular in the regions as they are on Broadway. Curry expressed his own experience with The Producers syndrome and its trickle down effect to regional theatre: “I think it [the use of celebrity on Broadway] is starting to backfire a little bit, because we just did The Producers; it didn’t sell

\(^{1}\)The League of Resident Theatres (LORT) is a professional theatre association with member theatres in every major U.S. market.
very well. I’ve not heard of anybody doing a production of *The Producers* that has sold well” (Personal communication, February 21, 2010). He went on to say:

I realize New York City is only concerned with New York. But, you know, when I look at New York, I look at our future, because what they’re doing today, we should be doing three, four years from now. We should be able to… There’s just not a lot coming out in New York that is of mass appeal to my audience. And it seems like the only way they [New York producers] able to sell it to their audience is to keep spending more and more money and making bigger and bigger productions and putting bigger and bigger names in the shows. (E. Curry, personal communication, February 21, 2010)

Nehls, who once lived in New York City but now prefers to spend his time in the regions, agrees with Curry: “New York theatre is getting a little high and mighty, honestly. You know, I think that what is being produced and being successful there isn’t necessarily working out in the regions” (Personal communication, January 31, 2011).

Celebrity & Regional Theatre

In the past, regional theatres—particularly for-profit dinner theatres—were notorious for their own version of celebrity casting, but this practice is not as ubiquitous as it once was:

Before Bob and Doug [the current owners] bought Beef and Boards back in 1980, it was a star place, where the washed up TV stars from the ‘60s would go. Well, Jerry Mathers and Tony Dow from *Leave It to Beaver*—Beaver and Wally—were in a show called *So Long Stanley*. And, you know, that’s fine. But it got to be way too expensive to bring in those stars and to get TV actors who didn’t know what they

---

197 *Leave It to Beaver* was a 1950s and 1960s American television sitcom.
were doing on stage. (E. Curry, personal communication, February 21, 2010)

Perhaps regional theatres were ahead of Broadway on the celebrity casting front. Small for-profit theatres in the regions tried capitalizing on celebrity many years ago but, according to Curry, ultimately found the practice not worth the cost—both financially and artistically.

Still, the lure of the sometimes-successful use of celebrity on Broadway, it seems, cannot be totally shaken off by some regional theatres. A few recent examples include Pennsylvania’s Media Theatre casting comedienne Wanda Sykes to alternate in the role of Miss Hannigan with a local actress in their production of *Annie*\(^{198}\) in late 2010 (see figure 4.8 below), as well as fashion designer Isaac Mizrahi directing and designing the costumes and set for *A Little Night Music* at the Opera Theatre of St. Louis in June 2010.

![Figure 4.8: Wanda Sykes in Annie, Media Theatre](from Fox, 2010)

\(^{198}\) *Annie* is a 1977 musical based upon the Harold Gray comic strip *Little Orphan Annie*. The music is by Charles Strouse, the lyrics are by Martin Charnin, and the book is by Thomas Meehan.
Reviews in both Sykes’ and Mizrahi’s cases were mixed: *Philadelphia City Paper* said, “Sykes’ performance has its peaks and valleys, but you gotta love that she’s doing it” (Fox, 2010, ¶ 3). Of Mizrahi’s work, *Opera News* said, “Turning this compelling vision into dramatic reality… was a challenge for first-time stage director Mizrahi, who—judging by the wide variety of performing styles on view—seemed to have left many of his actors to their own devices” (Malafronte, 2010, ¶ 2). These celebrities, no doubt, incited audience curiosity and boosted ticket sales for the not-for-profits, but the final product fell short of being a model of artistic integrity, something that not-for-profits frequently pride themselves in being and often consider part of their duty to the theatre. As O’Connor described it, this is the difference between what Broadway does and what not-for-profits should be doing: “They [Broadway] are like the dessert, whereas the not-for-profits are the spinach” (Personal communication, August 4, 2010).

**Regional Theatre’s Duty**

Redish loves this nourishing “spinach” quality she believes musical theatre is capable of having. While Redish has spent significant time working in New York City, she has found regional theatre (specifically, in Chicago) much more in sync with her own spinach-oriented artistic impulses:

I was working with some really talented people [in New York City]... I’d ask, ‘How are you?’ And they’d say, ‘Oh, life’s good. I’ve just been going to work.’ ‘Are you temping?’ And they were like, ‘No, my Broadway show.’ And I was like, ‘Oh, okay.’ And, you know, that’s different. Nobody in Chicago calls what they do work. You say, ‘I’m going to the theatre’...
This is not a generalization of New York versus Chicago, but it was interesting… If at the top level, if at the highest tier, we’re calling this work, something’s wrong. Something’s missing. (Personal communication, February 5, 2011)

For Redish, musicals like Adding Machine\(^{199}\) (for which she was the Choreographer and Assistant Director) prove that theatre does not always need to rely on celebrity, even in the highly commercial market of New York City. The New York Times described Adding Machine as an “impossibly bleak, improbably brilliant little musical” (¶ 2), brought to life “with ferocious truth by an astoundingly good cast of virtual unknowns” (¶ 5), that “radiates the unmistakable heat, the entrancing light, of aesthetic inspiration” (Isherwood, 2008, ¶ 5). Clearly, regional theatre is still very capable of nourishing the entire theatrical community in a way that is very different from Broadway: “[Adding Machine] came from Chicago. And we were doing a talk back for Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS\(^{200}\) or something [in New York City]… Someone raised their hand and was like, ‘What goes on in Chicago?’… I was like, ‘Okay, this is awesome’ (J. Redish, personal communication, February 5, 2011).

In his 2001 Americans for the Arts Nancy Hanks Lecture on Arts and Public Policy\(^{201}\), Frank Rich pleaded with arts institutions to think more like Redish:

\(^{199}\) Adding Machine is a musical adaptation of Elmer Rice’s 1923 play The Adding Machine. The music is by Joshua Schmidt, and the lyrics and book are by Schmidt and Jason Loewith. The musical premiered in 2007 at the Next Theater in Chicago and ran Off-Broadway in 2008. There were no celebrity elements associated with this production.

\(^{200}\) BC/EFA is an industry-based, nonprofit AIDS fundraising and grant-making organization.

\(^{201}\) The Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, DC hosts this annual address in conjunction with the annual Arts Advocacy Day.
More and more cultural institutions are trying to emulate the ways of entertainment companies rather than trying to challenge them... It’s defeating for cultural institutions to compromise their core mission, the presentation of culture itself, in the interest of mercantile self-promotion. But too often that’s what’s happening. (p. 22)

Many participants in this research agree that if the American musical is to flourish in the future, it must not abandon a culturally driven mission in favor of the strictly market-driven commercialism of celebrity—on both Broadway and, especially, in the regions.

Visions for the Future

![Figure 4.9: Shubert Alley Posters, 1957](from Wienir & Langel, 2004, Credit: Photofest)  
![Figure 4.10: Shubert Alley Posters, 2010](Personal photograph by author, Sept 2010)

Participants have varied visions for exactly what that future of the American musical looks like, but they universally see it surviving and, hopefully, thriving. Some envision this future riding on the backs of those with a true
passion for musical theatre and who appreciate its value as a communicative art form that connects to an audience:

To be realistically optimist and cautiously optimist... even if Broadway becomes this hole of celebrity and more and more money being thrown into crappier and crappier shows, the good thing to know is that there's people like the people in this room [the focus group]... who are passionate about musical theatre, and that there's no lack of people that have the passion and that really do love what they're doing... Good shows will still be produced. (Z. Edwards, personal communication, August 15, 2010)

Theatre is ultimately about communication. It's about sharing a story, sharing an experience, sharing a sentiment with an audience in the most visceral way possible... As communication, [theatre] is so vibrant. It sticks with you. I mean, I can go back to being eight years old and seeing Gypsy\(^{202}\) as a child—a little kid in grade school. And that show taught me the fallibility of my parents. I'd never thought about it before... Those lessons are why I got into theatre—that power, that persuasiveness of the art form. (S. Grenz, personal communication, July 24, 2010)

I think American musicals just need to stay current and contemporary. And I don't think that every show needs to take place in the present, but I think shows should always be speaking to things that are happening in the present... I think the most important thing with American musical theatre is just for shows to keep pushing the envelope. And the thing I love about musicals is that there are no rules... What I envision for American musical theatre is a place where any story can be told in any way that it wants to be told. (J. Bender, personal communication, August 12, 2010)

\(^{202}\) Gypsy is a 1959 musical with music by Jule Styne, lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, and book by Arthur Laurents. It is based on the memoirs of famous striptease artist Gypsy Rose Lee and focuses on her archetypal “stage mother,” Rose. Rose’s determination ultimately ruins her relationships with her daughters and everyone else.
Other participants hope for a future where what they currently see as a scale tipped too far toward commerce can be more evenly balanced between art and commerce:

I think musicals are still very popular. And I think people like the art form very much and care about it and are looking to it for catharsis, for comfort, for entertainment. And I do believe in my heart that there’s still room for a commercially viable piece that speaks three-dimensionally, that the music came from a composer and a lyricist and a book writer, that it came from a source material that is bettered by creating a musical around it, that it can be entertaining, popular, and still wildly artistic. That is my personal vision for what I’d like to do. (J. Redish, personal communication, February 5, 2011)

If we’re talking dream world… I would love it if the majority of shows being written for Broadway, the majority of shows being done in regional theatres with the hope of bringing them into New York, would be new material, because I think that the more, sort of, raw creative energy that goes into a show—even at the most basic level of developing an idea from scratch and, you know, sort of spinning it into so many different parts of a show—I think that that is the core of what doing a Broadway musical should be… The more of those steps that can be completely creative endeavors, sort of completely from nothing, I think the more intense and sort of life affirming that piece of theatre will be. (B. Haak, personal communication, September 4, 2010)

I want to do Hocus Pocus\textsuperscript{203}. The Musical… If/when Disney someday goes, ‘Yes. Here’s the writing team, and we want you to direct it,’ I will be there. And I will try to make it the best possible production of Hocus Pocus: The Musical ever. But I’m more excited about the title that we don’t know yet and the songs we’ve never heard about and the style of music that maybe nobody’s thought to put on Broadway, and that that’s the kind of stuff that’s thrilling and wonderful. (T. Greisler, personal communication, March 20, 2010)

\textsuperscript{203} Hocus Pocus is a 1993 Halloween-themed Disney film, which has not yet been adapted into a stage musical.
Some participants see the biggest impediment to a thriving future for the American musical as the spiraling costs associated with Broadway productions and the financial barriers it creates for audiences on Broadway and beyond. They hope these costs will somehow be combated in the future:

Something has got to be done with the cost of the theatre, because it’s becoming so exclusive and so, like, once-in-a-lifetime—almost like that whole Disney World trip. You know what I mean? Where, like, I take my kids to New York, and I have to see *the best show ever*, because it’s the only one they’ll ever see, because it’s so damn expensive. (D. Nehls, personal communication, January 31, 2011)

Broadway is very important to me. I am very nervous for Broadway because of the economics of Broadway and how difficult it has become, period, to produce anything on Broadway. It is so expensive... I get nervous... all the star-driven packages—I get it, it’s great... but I want people to go back to the theatre because it’s a part of their lives... I think Broadway’s at a real crossroads right now. How will it survive?... And I don’t have the answers. (J. Lane, personal communication, August 21, 2010)

Perhaps the most insightful hope for the future comes from actor M. Jason Blaine, who sums up everyone’s sentiments about the importance of creative new works, capping costs, utilizing the expertise of theatre craftsmen, and questioning how popular culture serves the theatre:

Art is still happening. It’s hard, but every once in a while a show like, you know, *Passing Strange*\(^2\)—which I thought was really great—those things with the original cast in tact, with the art still there and together, every once in a while those things will rise to the top... My hope is that—across the board—that talented writers, talented actors, talented

\(^2\) *Passing Strange* is a 2008 Broadway musical with lyrics and book by Stew and music by Stew and Heidi Rodewald.
directors find new and ingenious ways to make really good art for very little money... And, you know, I hope, too, that with as much media and as much stuff as there is out there to consume—with films and music and TV and all this stuff—like, the reason we put things on stage sort of has to evolve with it.... There has to be a reason why this piece, why something is being put on a stage instead of in other mediums. (Personal communication, August 15, 2010)
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Summary

Figure 5.1: Times Square, 47th Street & Broadway (Personal photograph by author, September 2010)

One research participant summed up the general sentiments of all the participants on the topic of Broadway’s use of celebrity when he said, “It’s a
mixed bag… I’m not completely against it. I’m not completely for it” (B. Golub, personal communication, August 15, 2010).

Professionals in the field understand the importance of capitalizing on popular culture as a marketing technique, which will continue attracting audiences and developing new audiences for musical theatre on Broadway, as the nation’s center for musical production. Moreover, there are many times when participants find the use of celebrity not only financially beneficial in attracting audiences, but a great artistic choice as well, especially when strong consideration is given to how the celebrity choice contributes to the telling of a dynamic story.

However, the participants also worry that artistic integrity and the valuation of theatre artists are becoming increasingly compromised in producers’ seemingly narrow focus on celebrity as a means for competition and moneymaking. Additionally, regional theatres are looking less and less to Broadway for inspiration and material, and they recognize that they are too-often lured into emulating a sector that has different goals than their own, because of the interconnectedness of the entire theatre community.

Looking towards the future, participants are hopeful for the American musical, but they wonder what kinds of new audiences are being created for the musical with the ubiquity of celebrity-driven productions. They are also uncertain where the Broadway musical has to go—and by extension, regional musical
theatre—given the ever-increasing financial costs, which celebrity components contribute to.

Implications

When the writing of this thesis concluded in April 2011, the following musicals were playing on Broadway:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Musical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Addams Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Anything Goes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billy Elliot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catch Me If You Can</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to Succeed...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Cage Aux Folles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mamma Mia!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Memphis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The People In the Picture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priscilla, Queen of the Dessert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Idiot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby It’s You!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Book of Mormon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jersey Boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Lion King</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Poppins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Million Dollar Quartet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*The Phantom of the Opera</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rain</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

*American Idiot* is an adaptation of the punk band Green Day’s concept album of the same name.

*Anything Goes* is a 1934 musical with music and lyrics by Cole Porter. It was recently revived on Broadway by Roundabout Theatre Company.

*Baby It’s You!* Features the music of the 1960s group The Shirelles and is written by Floyd Mutrux and Colin Escott.

*The Book of Mormon* is a new musical written by the creators of the television cartoon series *South Park*: Trey Parker, Robert Lopez, and Matt Stone.

*Catch Me If You Can* is a musical adaptation of the 2002 film of the same name. The book is by Terrence McNally and the score is by Marc Shaiman and Scott Wittman.

This revival production of *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* stars Daniel Radcliffe, most famous for portraying the title role in the *Harry Potter* films, as well as film and television actor John Larroquette.

*La Cage Aux Folles* is a 1983 musical with a book by Harvey Fierstein and music and lyrics by Jerry Herman. It is based on the 1973 French play of the same name by Jean Poiret. The 2010 revival originally starred television actor Kelsey Grammar and then later film and television actors Jeffrey Tambor (for only ten days) and Harvey Fierstein.

*Memphis* has music by David Bryan, lyrics by Bryan and Joe DiPietro, and a book by DiPietro. It is loosely based on the story of Dewey Phillips, a white Memphis disc jockey in the 1950s who was one of the first to play black music.

*Million Dollar Quartet* features the music of rock and roll stars Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash, Carl Perkins, and Jerry Lee Lewis. The book is by Floyd Mutrux and Colin Escott.

*The People In the Picture* features a book and lyrics by Iris Rainer Dart (author of the popular book *Beaches*, which was later made into film) and music by Artie Butler and post-World War II popular music-writer Mike Stoller. It also stars Nicole Parker from the television sketch comedy series *MADtv*.
Only the musicals with stars preceding them (just five of the 25 musicals on this list) can claim that they are not capitalizing on this report’s definition of celebrity, which includes celebrity casting, celebrities on creative teams, and the use of popular source material (like films and music). Clearly, the overall celebrity trend continues to be prevalent and has shown few signs of decline since this research began over a year ago.

On the other hand, the casting of popular culture celebrities in Broadway musicals seems less prevalent than it was a year ago. For example, in my interview with Justin Huff of the casting agency Telsey + Company, he told me that they were pursuing various celebrities for the leading role in the then-forthcoming Broadway musical *Sister Act*. He did not name anyone specific, but he hypothetically threw out Beyoncé, singer-actress Jennifer Hudson, and singer Janet Jackson as names that any producer would love to have associated with this production. Now that *Sister Act* has opened on Broadway, however, one can

---

215 *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* has a book by Stephan Elliott and Allan Scott and uses well-known 1960s and 1970s pop songs as the score. The stage musical is an adaptation of Elliott's 1994 Australian film *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*.

216 *Rain* is a limited engagement Beatles tribute show.

217 *Sister Act* is by Cheri Steinkellner and Bill Steinkellner, with lyrics by Glenn Slater and music by Alan Menken. It is based on the 1992 film of the same name.

218 *Spider-Man* has music and lyrics by popular musicians Bono (of U2) and The Edge and a book by Julie Taymor, Glen Berger, and Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa. The musical is based on the Spider-Man comics created by Stan Lee and Steve Ditko, which were published by Marvel Comics and have been adapted into many film and television incarnations.

219 *Wonderland* has music by Frank Wildhorn, lyrics by Jack Murphy, and a book by Murphy and Gregory Boyd. It is a contemporary version of Lewis Carol’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* and is set in New York City.
see that the producers did not end up making a celebrity casting choice. Instead, they went with an unknown, Patina Miller, who is making her Broadway debut.\textsuperscript{220} Perhaps Broadway has started to back away from this particular component of the celebrity trend, recognizing the potential for artistic compromise and, more likely, the irreplaceable nature of many celebrity performers.

In terms of celebrity components beyond casting, the new musical \textit{Spider-Man: Turn Off the Dark} seems a provocation for Broadway producers to think critically about the path they are on: \textit{Spider-Man} is the most expensive musical ever produced; the budget is $65 million, at last count. In 1965, a musical with 90 percent of its seats sold in a 1,500-seat house could recoup its investment in 30 weeks (Grimes 1997). In 1995, a musical needed 90 weeks at the same capacity to break even (Grimes, 1997). \textit{Spider-Man} will likely take at least 207 weeks at 96 percent capacity in the Foxwoods Theatre, with a capacity of over 1,800, before it will begin to make any profit (Rampell, 2010).

Additionally, \textit{Spider-Man} has been plagued with numerous technical and creative problems. If it opens as currently planned in June 2011, it will have had the longest preview period of any Broadway show in history, at over six months of previews. Due to these delays, critics have refused to wait until the opening date to review the production, as they would normally do, and \textit{New York Times} critic Ben Brantley (2011) called the production a “national joke” (¶ 7). \textit{Spider-Man} could be seen as the epitome of the out-of-control snowball effect of

\textsuperscript{220} Miller originated the role in the prior West End production of the musical \textit{Sister Act}. 
Broadway producers competing to have the biggest stars, the most popular trends, the most expensive technical effects—all presented inside a corporate-branded theatre—only to end up a “national joke.”

This paper does not aim to say that Broadway sometimes choosing to capitalize on celebrity is a threat to musical theatre. In fact, large entertainment companies and their business “synergy” may actually be working to bring the Broadway musical back into popular culture (Wollman, 2006). The paper, rather, strives to show that celebrity seems to have become the default “go-to” choice in a risk-averse economic environment, and perhaps this increasingly embedded corporate thought process is a threat to be concerned with in regards to the American musical.

Takeaways for the Arts Manager

Across time, there have been three essential elements in developing and producing the creative product of any type: art/talent, resources/capital, and management (Langley & Abruzzo, 1990). In the not-for-profit sector, I would add public value as a fourth important component to this list. In both the for-profit and not-for-profit sectors, it is helpful to think of these components as interwoven cogs (see figures 5.2 and 5.3 below), each involved in the turning of the others, but with the management cog providing the greatest thrust for the other balanced cogs:

---

221 Synergy is a tactic that allows companies to sell a particular product and simultaneously integrate that product into a web of related products (such as the integration of Disney’s films, stage musicals, theme parks, and merchandise on an international scale).
Capitalizing on celebrity, no doubt, helps oil the Resources cog by attracting new and repeat audiences for musical theatre, but it rarely—although occasionally—does much to keep the Art and Public Value cogs turning. Managers must remember that their jobs are to balance the turning of these cogs in relation to one another; otherwise, this creative product mechanism cannot function properly. Preoccupation with the familiarity of popular culture to support the Resources cog can sometimes work against the other cogs, bringing the entire system to a halt.

This potential for mechanical failure is illustrated by looking at what has happened with the decline of classical music in America in parallel to the growth of the popular music industry (Wollman, 2006). The NEA’s 2008 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (2009) shows that thirty years ago, classical music attendance was not far behind the most recent musical theatre attendance rate,
with 13% of Americans having attended a classical music activity in the prior twelve months. That figure declined by only .5% over the next ten years, but by 2002, attendance at classical music activities was declining more drastically; by 2008, it was down to only 9.3% (NEA, 2009). The parallel here is that it seems classical music has been more concerned with the Art cog of the creative product mechanism than the other cogs, and the result has been an almost complete breakdown of the system. It is only those classical music organizations that have incorporated some elements of popular culture—such as “pops” concerts and utilizing alternative performance spaces—that have been able to keep the other cogs, namely Resources, in balance and harmoniously turning.

The decline of classical music in America is unfortunate for the arts community at large. But I would argue that it is more important for Americans to keep the creative product mechanism supporting musical theatre oiled, aligned, and operating than it is for that of classical music and other more “traditional” European arts. In many ways, musical theatre is America’s classical music, because it is one of the few art forms with indigenous American “roots.” It is not the “potted hothouse product” of imported European classical music (Horowitz, 2005, p. xiv). That is to say, musical theatre is a significant component of America’s unique artistic repertoire, which seems to incite the strongest kind of obligation for preservation and development.

While drawing upon existing associations for audiences—like casting their favorite celebrities—may initially get them to the theatre and oil musical theatre’s
Resources cog, there is evidence that just getting them in the door is not enough to generate a continued appetite that will extend across a diverse artistic canon, something that is crucial for the creation of new musicals and the continuation of the art form. Elizabeth L. Wollman (2006) states in her book *The Theater Will Rock*: “[I]t must be remembered that showing people their favorite films live on stage, no matter how innovative the adaptation, is not necessarily going to create lifelong theatergoers” (p. 153). Wollman (2006) goes on to express concern for the creation of new, original musicals by citing statistics put out by the Broadway League showing that since 1984, the seasons that had the fewest new productions were usually the most financially successful. In other words, by capitalizing on celebrity, it is possible that many audiences have been “trained” to expect the familiar, and if it is not given to them, they have no other interest in going to the theatre.

In Moss Hart’s 1959 autobiography *Act One: An Autobiography by Moss Hart*, he says:

‘I suspect that today’s bland dismissal of the intellectual and the overwhelming emphasis placed on the necessity of competing and of success are due in part to the strange taboo we have set against that softness in ourselves which brings men closest to the angels. A nation of poets would be no more desirable than a nation of athletes, but I wonder if that toughness and competitiveness, which have become an ingrained part of our character as a people and a symbol of our way of life as a nation, are not a sign of weakness as well as of strength. Is our cultural life not robbed of a necessary

---

222 Hart wrote regularly with George S. Kaufman on musicals such as *I’d Rather Be Right* (mentioned in “Chapter 2: Literature Review”). He also notably directed of the original 1960 Broadway production of *Camelot*.
dimension and our emotional life of an element of grace?‘ (quoted in Wall, 1996, p. 34)

Striking a balance like Hart describes above is not easy, but I see promising strategies that find a middle ground between the familiar and the new in shows like Wicked and In the Heights. In the case of Wicked, audiences have associations with the original source material (The Wizard of Oz), but the musical is not regurgitating on stage the story and songs everyone already knows. Moreover, although the production has employed some celebrity casting, it does not require star names to sell the title. In the Heights has also had success without relying universally on celebrity, because it utilizes a familiar and popular “sound” in its rap and Latin-style music but is still a completely original musical. The success of Wicked and In the Heights shows that it is possible to take old forms and the feeling of familiarity and still infuse a show with fresh, creative ideas that draw upon the talents of skilled theatre craftsmen. Familiarity and innovation do not have to be mutually exclusive (Wollman, 2006).

Does This Research Matter?

Maybe it is not ultimately important whether or not fresh and innovative art by talented theatre artists is present on Broadway. But for the participants in this research, it certainly is important, and their worries are not new: People have fretted over the fate of musical theatre and its sometimes too commercial techniques for survival almost as long as the musical has existed as an art form. In a 1998 article in The New York Times, one critic says:
In the world of musical theater, change is a matter of opinion. Music styles, producing practices, staging conventions persist in loving stasis for generations, interrupted by spasms of change that can be very convenient. Denial is always an option. Take ‘Rent’ for example... contrarians in musical theater will tell you that ‘Rent’—a story involving drugs, AIDS and young people in the East Village—is really just ‘Hair’ retrofitted for the ’90s. Nothing new. Andrew Lloyd Webber’s impact in the ‘80s? Just recycled Rodgers and Hammerstein with a boost of spectacle. No real change there. (Singer, 1998, ¶ 1)

While some might see this project as falling into the “more of the same” category of concerns that have plagued musical theatre professionals for years, I hope the research participants and the readers of this report have experienced some kind of impact by encountering this project. During the interview processes, many participants (particularly the theatre administrators) were forced to think critically about questions that, in some cases, had never before been posed to them. Such reflection has possibly changed the way these individuals have approached their work since their participation, even before they have read the final research report. Moreover, readers of this report have also been asked to think critically about any preconceived notions they had about the topic.

As Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) write, “…[I]nquiry is not a search ‘behind the veil’ of appearances that ends in the identification of an unchanging transcendent reality. Instead, inquiry is an act within a stream of experience that generates new relations that then become a part of future experience” (p. 41). I see this generation of new relations and experience as the ultimate benefit of this project for the participants, for readers, and for myself as a researcher. One
might even find a public value benefit herein, as the information this project contains about America’s indigenous cultural heritage and the new knowledge it generates about musical theatre is multiplied and disseminated even further into the networks of people who interact with the project.

_Final Thoughts_

It is true that musicals have most frequently fallen into the category of popular and commercial entertainment, but it is also true that musicals hold a special place within America’s artistic repertoire. In addition to providing their own brand of entertainment, history has shown that musicals can also be idea bearing and socially relevant. It is this line that musical theatre walks that makes it such a valuable art form. As the most popular of the performing arts in America, it has the potential to provide a simultaneously entertaining and intrinsically beneficial experience for an audience, which could incite them to have a deeper appreciation for this and other art forms going forward.

If the elements of Broadway’s use of celebrity that this research has shown could be detrimental can be avoided by those who are creating and managing musical theatre, I believe the American musical will survive, and even thrive. But to do this, musical theatre practitioners must avoid the magnetic din of mediocrity in celebrity culture and take advantage only of those celebrity-driven opportunities that have potential to benefit the art form beyond the present moment—of which there could be many. Although musical theatre cannot escape the current celebrity-obsessed environment, I do not believe that Broadway and
musical theatre must universally “grin and bear it,” as Glinda suggests Elphaba do in the non-celebrity-driven hit *Wicked*:

> And though you protest,  
> Your disinterest,  
> I know clandestinely:  
> You’re gonna grin and bear it,  
> Your new found popularity.\(^{223}\)

After all, it is Elphaba—who follows her intuition and does not dotingly follow the crowd—not Glinda, who ends up living happily ever after in the end.

---

\(^{223}\) Source: www.allmusicals.com
REFERENCES


Individual Interview

Hello [name],

I am writing to inquire if you might be interested in participating in my graduate thesis research, which is going to explore the use of “celebrity” in Broadway musicals and how it has affected/is affecting the distinctly American art form of musical theatre.

I am interviewing professionals from a variety of roles within the theatre, and I think your specific perspective could be a valuable one because of your expertise and/or participation in both Broadway and regional musical theatre production and programming over the course of your career. Unfortunately, there is no compensation for participating, except my incredible gratitude. If you would like to participate, I will additionally send you a copy of the consent form, which will describe in more detail your rights as a participant.

Please let me know if you are interested and when you would be available for about an hour at a convenient location of your choosing over the next month or so. A telephone interview or video chat interview (such as Skype) is also an option, if a face-to-face is not feasible.

Thank you in advance,
Nicole M. Grothues
M.A. Arts Policy & Administration Candidate
The Ohio State University
Focus Group

Hello [name],

I am writing to inquire if you might be interested in participating in my graduate thesis research, which is going to explore the use of “celebrity” in Broadway musicals and how it has affected/is affecting the distinctly American art form of musical theatre.

I am interviewing professionals from a variety of roles within the theatre, and I would like to get together a group of professional musical theatre actors for a focus group, because I think this groups’ specific perspective could be a valuable one. Unfortunately, there is no monetary compensation for participating, but refreshments will be provided. If you would like to participate, I will additionally send you a copy of the consent form, which will describe in more detail your rights as a participant.

Please respond with whether you are interested and if so, when you might be available over the next month or so. The focus group would require about an hour and a half of your time at a yet to be determined location.

Thanks in advance,
Nicole M. Grothues
M.A. Arts Policy & Administration Candidate
The Ohio State University
Appendix B: Participant Consent Forms

Individual Interview

NAME: 
TITLE/ROLE (i.e. Director, Producer, Etc.): 
ADDRESS: 
PHONE: 
EMAIL: 

This interview is being conducted for the purposes of Nicole Grothues’ master’s degree thesis project. The purpose of this research is to understand the current state and the future of the American musical—specifically in regards to the recent trend of using “celebrity” in Broadway musicals. You are being asked to participate in this research because of your expertise and/or participation in both Broadway and regional music theatre production and programming over the course of your career.

By signing below [or replying to the email with your contact information], you affirm that you understand and agree to the following:

• The interview should take no more than one hour.
• Your participation is voluntary.
• Any information you share will be used only for the purposes of this research.
• Your name and experience/role within the field will be credited to any information you share that is included in the final research report as appropriate, unless you request otherwise.
• You may refuse to answer any question.
• You may withdraw from participation at any time without penalty, and any already collected information will not be used in the research.
• The interview will be sound-recorded; the resulting audio file will be transcribed. The audio file, transcribed document, and Nicole’s interview notes will be stored in Nicole’s personal computer over the course of conducting this research and for at least three years following the completion of the research.
• You will not be monetarily compensated for this interview or the resulting final research report.
Should you have any questions or concerns about this research at a later date, or if you would like a copy of the final research report, you may contact Nicole or her supervising Principal Investigator, Margaret Wyszomirski, using the following information:

Nicole M. Grothues  
Grothues.1@osu.edu

Dr. Margaret J. Wyszomirski, Professor of Art Education  
The Ohio State University  
Wyszomirski.1@osu.edu

Signature: ___________________________ Date: ________  

Thank you for your participation!

*For questions about your rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact Ms. Sandra Meadows in the Office of Responsible Research Practices at 1-800-678-6251.

Focus Group

NAME:
ADDRESS:
PHONE:
EMAIL:

This focus group is being conducted for the purposes of Nicole Grothues’ master’s degree thesis project. The purpose of this research is to understand the current state and the future of the American musical—specifically in regards to the recent trend of using “celebrity” in Broadway musicals. You are being asked to participate in this research because of your expertise and/or participation in both Broadway and regional music theatre production and programming over the course of your career.

By signing below, you affirm that you understand and agree to the following:
  • This focus group should take no more than an hour and a half.
  • Your participation is voluntary.
  • Any information you share will be used only for the purposes of this research. However, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, due to the participation of other individuals in this focus group.
• Your name and experience within the field will be credited to any information you share that is included in the final research report as appropriate, unless you request otherwise.
• You may refuse to answer any question.
• You may withdraw from participation at any time without penalty, and any already collected information will not be used in the research.
• The focus group will be sound-recorded; the resulting audio file will be transcribed. The audio file, transcribed document, and Nicole’s notes will be stored in Nicole’s personal computer over the course of conducting this research and for at least three years following the completion of the research.
• You will not be monetarily compensated for this focus group or the resulting final research report.

Should you have any questions or concerns about this research at a later date, or if you would like a copy of the final research report, you may contact Nicole or her supervising Principal Investigator, Margaret Wyszomirski, using the following information:

Nicole M. Grothues
Grothues.1@osu.edu

Dr. Margaret Wyszomirski, Professor of Art Education
The Ohio State University
Wyszomirski.1@osu.edu

Signature: ____________________________ Date: _______

Thank you for your participation!

*For questions about your rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact Ms. Sandra Meadows in the Office of Responsible Research Practices at 1-800-678-6251.
Appendix C: Interview/Focus Group Questions

The following questions are representative of the kinds of questions that were posed to participants, either in individual interviews or for discussion in the focus group. Not every question was posed to every participant, and the wording of the questions varied from situation to situation.

1. Tell me about your theatre education and your professional history/journey in the theatre.

2. What theatre projects are you working on now?

3. Can you tell me about any upcoming projects that you are excited about?

4. Have you worked on any musicals involving celebrities in some capacity (as a cast member, producer, writer, etc.)?

5. Put on your audience member hat: What Broadway musicals have you seen celebrity used in (as a cast member, producer, or writer, or using popular films or music)?

6. What did you think of the show?

7. Why do you think Broadway producers make these kinds of choices? (What are the payoffs for them?)

8. Can you imagine any other reasons?

9. In your opinion, are there any compromises that Broadway makes in using celebrity?

10. Do you have any specific musical examples where using celebrity was an obvious mistake?

11. Is there a regional theatre equivalent to using celebrity?

12. Do you have a specific example?
13. How does this celebrity trend affect how you approach the field, if at all?

14. How would you compare the goals of Broadway to your own artistic goals? (What is your relationship like with Broadway?)

15. What is the relationship between Broadway and regional theatres? (How do you see them interacting and influencing one another?)

16. What is your ideal vision for the future of American musical theatre?

17. How does your ideal differ from what you expect to be the reality?

18. Do you have anything you want to add that we have not talked about?

Additional questions for those who have worked directly with celebrity

19. Is the artistic process somehow different when celebrity is involved?

20. How do you think the celebrity views their role in the artistic process?

21. Do you think these celebrities are conscious of the fact that they are sometimes just a means to a financial end?

Additional question for those involved in theatre education

22. How do you think the next generation (high school and college students, theatre camp kids, etc.) views musical theatre and Broadway?
Appendix D: Popular Celebrity in Broadway Musicals,\textsuperscript{224} 2009-2010 Season to 2009-2010 Season\textsuperscript{225}

\textit{Casting}\textsuperscript{226}

1999

Carol Burnett in \textit{Putting It Together}
Kathy Lee Gifford in \textit{Putting It Together}

2000

Dick Cavett in \textit{The Rocky Horror Show}
Toni Collette in \textit{The Wild Party}
Joan Jett in \textit{The Rocky Horror Show}
Eartha Kitt in \textit{The Wild Party}
Christopher Walken in \textit{James Joyce’s The Dead}

2001

Sebastian Bach in \textit{The Rocky Horror Show}
Matthew Broderick in \textit{The Producers}
Aaron Carter in \textit{Seussical}
Taylor Dayne in \textit{Aida}
Ana Gasteyer in \textit{The Rocky Horror Show}
Gilbert Gottfried in \textit{The Rocky Horror Show}
Nathan Lane in \textit{The Producers}
Robin Leach in \textit{The Rocky Horror Show}
Eric McCormack in \textit{The Music Man}
Rosie O’Donnell in \textit{Seussical}

\textsuperscript{224} This list does not claim to be exhaustive and includes only those who were popular culture celebrities at the time they were working on Broadway. Appearing on this list does not suggest that the celebrity choice was successful or popular, just that it occurred.

\textsuperscript{225} May 31, 1999 – May 23, 2010. Only includes those shows that opened during this time, not that were open prior to May 31, 1999 and continued to run or that have opened since May 23, 2010. So, for example, the numerous celebrity replacement actors that continue to be used in \textit{Chicago} are not included because the musical opened in 1996. As another example, \textit{Catch Me If You Can} is not included in the list of celebrity source material musicals because the musical opened in 2011. Replacement actors used after May 31, 2010—even if the show was open prior to that time—are not included either.

\textsuperscript{226} Both celebrities who originated roles and those who were replacement actors are included.
Penn & Teller in *The Rocky Horror Show*
Luke Perry in *The Rocky Horror Show*
Sally Jessy Raphael in *The Rocky Horror Show*
Cathy Rigby in *Seussical*
Jerry Springer in *The Rocky Horror Show*

2002

Patty Duke in *Oklahoma!*
John Lithgow in *The Sweet Smell of Success*
Darlene Love in *Hairspray*
Vanessa Williams in *Into the Woods*

2003

Antonio Banderas in *Nine*
Toni Braxton in *Aida*
Delta Burke in *Thoroughly Modern Millie*
Tom Cavanagh in *Urinetown*
Taye Diggs in *Wicked*
Boy George in *Taboo*
Hugh Jackman in *The Boy From Oz*
Eartha Kitt in *Nine*
Jane Krakowski in *Nine*
Mary Stuart Masterson in *Nine*
Charles Shaughnessy in *Urinetown*
John Stamos in *Nine*
Michelle Williams in *Aida*

2004

Dixie Carter in *Thoroughly Modern Millie*
Patrick Cassidy in *42nd Street*
Deborah Cox in *Aida*
Daniel Davis in *La Cage Aux Folles*
Joey Fatone in *Little Shop of Horrors*
Tamyra Gray in *Bombay Dreams*
Neil Patrick Harris in *Assassins*
Shirley Jones in *42nd Street*
Joey McIntyre in *Wicked*
Michael McKean in *Hairspray*
Brooke Shields in *Wonderful Town*

2005

Christina Applegate in *Sweet Charity*
Hank Azaria in *Spamalot*
Fantasia Barrino in *The Color Purple*
Tevin Campbell in *Hairspray*
Keith Carradine in *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*  
Tim Curry in *Spamalot*  
Robert Goulet in *La Cage Aux Folles*  
John Lithgow in *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*  
Rue McClanahan in *Wicked*  
Rosie O’Donnell in *Fiddler on the Roof*  
David Hyde Pierce in *Spamalot*

2006

Harry Connick, Jr. in *The Pajama Game*  
Tony Danza in *The Producers*  
Diana DeGarmo in *Hairspray*  
Haylie Duff in *Hairspray*  
Ana Gasteyer in *Wicked*  
Ana Gasteyer in *The Threepenny Opera*  
Carol Kane in *Wicked*  
Cyndi Lauper in *The Threepenny Opera*  
Nellie McKay in *The Threepenny Opera*  
Michael McKean in *The Pajama Game*  
Jo Anne Worley in *The Drowsy Chaperone*

2007

Lance Bass in *Hairspray*  
Whoopi Goldberg in *Xanadu*  
Jerry Mathers in *Hairspray*  
Megan Mullaly in *Young Frankenstein*  
Darrell Hammond in *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*  
David Hyde Pierce in *Curtains*  
Mo Rocca in *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*  
Bob Saget in *Drowsy Chaperone*  
George Wendt in *Hairspray*

2008

Clay Aiken in *Spamalot*  
Stockard Channing in *Pal Joey*  
Taylor Hicks in *Grease*  
Drew Lachey in *Spamalot*  
Mario Lopez in *A Chorus Line*  
Martha Plimpton in *Pal Joey*  
Tom Wopat in *A Catered Affair*  
Ace Young in *Grease*

2009

Gina Gershon in *Bye Bye Birdie*  
Lauren Graham in *Guys & Dolls*
Allison Janney in 9 to 5
Angela Lansbury in A Little Night Music
Constantine Maroulis in Rock of Ages
Nicole Parker in Wicked
Oliver Platt in Guys & Dolls
John Stamos in Bye Bye Birdie
Catherine Zeta-Jones in A Little Night Music

2010
Corbin Bleu in In the Heights
Kristin Chenoweth in Promises, Promises
Diana DeGarmo in Hair
Kelsey Grammer in La Cage Aux Folles
Sean Hayes in Promises, Promises
Nathan Lane in The Addams Family
Bebe Neuwirth in The Addams Family
Vanessa Williams in Sondheim on Sondheim
Tom Wopat in Sondheim on Sondheim
Ace Young in Hair

Creative Team

2000
Elton John, Composer of Aida

2001
Mel Brooks, Producer & Writer of The Producers
Harry Connick, Jr., Composer of Thou Shalt Not
Alanis Morisette, Contributor to Jane Eyre

2002
Whoopi Goldberg, Producer of Thoroughly Modern Millie
Baz Luhrmann, Director of La Bohème

2003
Boy George, Composer of Taboo
Rosie O’Donnell, Producer of Taboo

2005
Oprah Winfrey, Producer of The Color Purple

2006
Phil Collins, Composer of Tarzan
Elton John, Composer of Lestat
Isaac Mizrahi, Costume Designer for The Threepenny Opera
Duncan Sheik, Composer of *Spring Awakening*

2007
Mel Brooks, Producer & Writer of *Young Frankenstein*

2008
Elton John, Composer of *Billy Elliot*

2009
Shawn “Jay-Z” Carter, Producer of *Fela!*
Will & Jada Pinkett Smith, Producers of *Fela!*

**Source Material - Music**

2001
*Mamma Mia!*

2002
*Movin' Out*

2003
*The Boy From Oz*

2004
*Good Vibrations*

2005
*All Shook Up*
*Jersey Boys*
*Lennon*

2006
*Hot Feet*
*Ring of Fire*
*The Times They Are A-Changin'*

---

227 The musicals listed in this category use previously existing music and rely on that music’s popular appeal. They are often referred to as “jukebox musicals.” If new material was written by a popular musician—even if it appears alongside some of their existing material—they were included as a composer in the “Celebrity Creative Team” category. For example, in *Taboo*, some Culture Club hits were included in the musical, but it was mostly an original score by Boy George. Furthermore, musicals based on films often use popular hit songs from the film in the musical’s score (for example, *Saturday Night Fever*). Those musicals are only listed in the film category, because they are relying mostly on the film title’s popular appeal.
2009
Fela!
Rock of Ages

2010
American Idiot
Come Fly Away
Million Dollar Quartet

Source Material – Popular Film/Television/Books

1999
Saturday Night Fever

2000
The Full Monty
Seussical

2001
The Producers

2002
Hairspray
The Sweet Smell of Success
Thoroughly Modern Millie

2005
Chitty Chitty Bang Bang
The Color Purple
Dirty Rotten Scoundrels
Spamalot

2006
High Fidelity
How the Grinch Stole Christmas!
Mary Poppins
Tarzan
The Wedding Singer

2007
Legally Blonde
Xanadu
Young Frankenstein
2008
  * Billy Elliot
  * A Catered Affair
  * Cry-Baby
  * The Little Mermaid
  * Shrek
  * White Christmas

2009
  * 9 to 5

2010
  * The Addams Family