University of Cincinnati

Date: 2/28/2017

I. Alexandre Badue, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Music (Musicology).

It is entitled:
Communicating in Song: The American Sung-Through Musical from In Trousers (1979) to Caroline, or Change (2004)

Student's name:  
Alexandre Badue

This work and its defense approved by:

Committee chair: Bruce McClung, Ph.D.

Committee member: David Carson Berry, Ph.D.

Committee member: Jeongwon Joe, Ph.D.
Communicating in Song: The American Sung-Through Musical from *In Trousers* (1979) to *Caroline, or Change* (2004)

A dissertation submitted to the

Graduate School

of the University of Cincinnati

in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the Division of Composition, Musicology, and Theory

of the College-Conservatory of Music

by

Alexandre Bádué

BM, Federal University of Paraná, 2007

MM, University of Cincinnati, 2012

Committee Chair: bruce d. mcclung, PhD
ABSTRACT

In the American musical theater, the book musical has always presented a conspicuous alternation of songs and spoken dialogue. The former interrupt the latter and provide additional means to depict the characters and the dramatic situations. In the last quarter of the twentieth century, however, a second subgenre of the musical came to prominence: the sung-through musical, in which the entire script—monologues, conversations, turning points—all occur in song, eschewing spoken dialogue and contrasting with the aesthetics of the book musical.

This dissertation demonstrates that by avoiding spoken dialogue and increasing the amount of music, American sung-through musicals from 1979 until 2004 challenged the means of structuring musicals. This study investigates how creative teams of sung-through musicals have used songs alone to create, organize, and communicate dramaturgy, questioning the limits between singing and speaking in musical theater. This study comprises twelve sung-through musicals that were written and composed in the United States and originally produced in New York City’s Broadway or Off-Broadway circuits. It does not consider the British sung-through musicals that were successful on Broadway during the same time period.

This study considers songs the main unit of the dramatic action in a sung-through musical and argues that communication occurs through the sequence of songs: an alignment and order of songs that create the dramatic action and assume the functions of dialogues, monologues, and soliloquies. On one hand, this study considers structural similarities that these musicals share: their songs acquire similar dramatic functions, and the sequence of songs can occur in two ways: as a song-cycle or with an embedded-song structure. On the other hand, I investigate changes that each musical went through during its compositional process. Changes made to song content and song order in each of the musicals establish compositional techniques that fueled the
development of the sung-through aesthetic. Finally, this dissertation contextualizes the American sung-through musical as postmodern. Using literary critic Fredric Jameson’s conceptualization of pastiche in postmodernism, this study explores how the practice of referencing several different genres of popular music in a sung-through structure has allowed musical theater to enter and thrive in the postmodern era. This study’s methodology includes musical and dramatic analyses of the selected musicals; archival research on their inception, compositional process, and reception; and personal interviews with six of the eight composers.

This dissertation ultimately defines the processes and innovations that the American musical theater underwent in the last two decades of the twentieth century in order to continue its tradition and to remain relevant after its prosperous Golden Age.
To my parents

“Assim como a canção só tem razão se se cantar…eu não existo sem você.”
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to the six composers who offered their time to be interviewed and answer my questions about their compositional process: William Finn, Michael John LaChiusa, Andrew Lippa, Jeffrey Lunden, Galt MacDermot, and Jeanine Tesori. They helped to shape and to define the purpose and content of this study. I was a fan of musical theater before I became a musical theater scholar, and having the chance to meet and talk to these successful composers and learn more how they see their role in the development of the American musical theater, as well as their opinions, tastes, and personal stories, was an honor. They all provided insightful comments on their own music and important information about their musicals that I could not have found anywhere else. I will be forever grateful for their willingness to meet with me and provide such assistance. I would like to also thank the individuals who helped me contact these composers and schedule the interviews: Steven Cahn, John Grimmett, Bryan Matechen, Vince and MaryAnne McDermot, Nick Myers (from The Dramatist Guild), Steve Swayne, and Ben Wexler. I also thank Brad Lorenz from Samuel French for granting me access to the piano-vocal scores of several of the musicals.

I am thankful for having had access to the archival materials housed in the following libraries and the support offered by staff members: The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts and the Library of Congress, especially Mark Horowitz for his help before, during, and after my three-week stay in Washington, DC. My research at the Library of Congress could not have happened without the support and permission of the Larson State, especially Jonathan Mills. I could not have completed my research in these two libraries without the generous financial support from the Theodore Presser Foundation and the Cincinnati Branch of the English Speaking Union. I am also grateful to the University of Cincinnati’s Graduate School
for a Graduate Dean’s Fellowship for the 2016–2017 school year, which was instrumental in helping me to finish my writing and to schedule my defense.

I would like to thank Kim Kowalke and Howard Pollack for the help that I received from them during my research. I am also thankful to my cognate advisor, Trish Henley, whose seminars and vast knowledge of theater and comparative literature helped to shape the interdisciplinary nature of my research. I am also thankful to individuals who in one way or another helped me during my research process: Juliana Botero, Veronica Buchanan, Doris Haag, Juan Montoya, and Sarah Pozderac-Chenevey. I am thankful also for insightful conversations with other musical theater fans and specialists Dan Blim, Erik Haagensen, and Michael Kennedy.

I am very thankful to the musicology faculty at the University of Cincinnati’s College-Conservatory of Music (CCM). The classes and conversations through my eight-and-a-half years as a graduate student have had a great impact on my life: not only have they enhanced my musical knowledge, but also prepared me to be an efficient teacher, a resourceful researcher, and a better musician. I would like to thank especially Stephanie Schlagel (who put great effort into bringing me to CCM when I applied) and Jonathan Kregor and Mary Sue Morrow. My dissertation would not have the structure and organization that it has now had it not been for Stephen Myer’s interest in my research and progress during my writing process. I thank him for valuable conversations and suggestions. I am also thankful for the support from CCM musical theater professors Roger Grodsky and Diane Lala. Professor Grodsky brought two of the musicals considered in this study (The Human Comedy and Hello Again) to my attention, and I was able to see these productions during my years at CCM. The first time I saw Falsettos was also at CCM. I thank professor Grodsky for his insights on directing these musicals and also for conversations about musical theater in general.
I thank David Carson Berry for serving on my dissertation committee and introducing me to scholarship on American popular songs beyond musical theater. Jeongwon Joe has been supportive of my growth as a scholar. I thank her for classes in twentieth-century music, help with my first publication in a journal, and for her support when I applied for travel grants and fellowships. I am also thankful to her for helping with scholarship and bibliography on postmodernism, and now for serving in my dissertation committee. I have learned in one of my favorite musical theater songs that “Each step is indispensable when you’re on the right track.” I am very thankful for being advised by Bruce McClung in all of the steps that lead me towards my PhD. Throughout my years at CCM, he helped and supported me in all of the indispensable steps: coursework, teaching experience, qualifying exams, finding a dissertation topic, grant writing, archival research, conference presentation, writing and defending this dissertation, and entering the job market. I am indebted to him for his careful readings of my drafts and insightful comments and questions. I thank him for doing all this with responsibility and professionalism that certainly have influenced me as a scholar. I thank him for helping me stay on the right track.

Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends for supporting me since the day that I left them all in Brazil to pursue a career in the United States. The names are too many to mention here, but I would like to highlight four. First, my cousin Ana Flávia Bádue, with whom I can talk about anything from family gossip to the most recent scholarship on postmodernism. I thank her for bringing scholarship on pastiche to my attention and for helping me navigate through it. Second, my husband, Dmitry Uhlianitsa, whom I met when this dissertation was in its early stages and turned out to be not just a fantastic partner, but a supporter of my work, accompanying me in research trips and being very patient during the writing process. Finally, my parents, to whom I dedicate this dissertation. I thank them for instilling the values of having an
education in me and my brothers, and for supporting me in all of the choices that I have made to
grow personally and professionally. I also thank them for introducing me and my brothers to all
kinds and genres of music.
Table of Contents

PART I: DRAMATIC ACTION AND THE STRUCTURE OF Sung-Through MusicalS

CHAPTER 1. SONG-THROUGH Musicals THAT Employ A Song-Cycle Structure ............24
   INCEPTION .............................................................................26
   SONG SEQUENCE IN THE Song-Cycle Structure .............................................45

CHAPTER 2. SONG-THROUGHMusicals THAT Employ AN Embedded-Song Structure ......63
   INTERRUPTED SONG ........................................................................65
   SONG EXCERPTS ........................................................................72
   THEMES .....................................................................................77
   UNDERSCORING ..........................................................................84
   SPOKEN LINES AND DIALOGUE .........................................................91

CHAPTER 3. SONG TYPES AND THE PRESENTATION OF THE DRAMATIC Action ............106

PART II: COMPOSITIONAL PROCESS AND THE SONG ORDER OF Sung-Through MusicalS

CHAPTER 4. HOW CHANGES MADE TO Songs’ Structure Affect DRAMATIC Action ..........143
   SONGS THAT WERE EXPANDED .......................................................144
   SONGS THAT WERE CURTAILED ......................................................152
   CHANGES THAT ENHANCED SUBPLOT DEVELOPMENT .............................159
   SONGS ASSIGNED TO DIFFERENT CHARACTERS ..................................165

CHAPTER 5. HOW CHANGES MADE TO Songs’ Structure AND THEIR Placement IN THE Plot
   Affect DRAMATIC Action ......................................................................171
   “LONG PAST SUNSET” (The Human Comedy) .............................................171
   “POOR, UNSUCCESSFUL, AND Fat” (A New Brain) ....................................173
   “Will I” (Rent) .................................................................................175
   “OUT Tonight” (Rent) ..........................................................................177
   “Santa Fe” (Rent) .............................................................................180
   “Halloween” (Rent) ...........................................................................181
   “How Did We Come To This?” (The Wild Party) .......................................184
   THE CASE OF “I’M BREAKING DOWN” ................................................187
   CUT OR REPLACED SONGS...................................................................193

CHAPTER 6. HOW CHANGES MADE TO Songs’ ORDER Affect DRAMATIC Action ..........207
   The Three Lives of In TrouserS ..............................................................207
   The Mark-Maureen-Joanne plot in Rent ..................................................216
   Mark’S Plot Hole in Rent ......................................................................222
   Song Order in A New Brain .....................................................................225
   Songs for Mr. Bungee in A New Brain ....................................................231
PART III: CHILDREN OF POSTMODERNISM

CHAPTER 7. PASTICHE SCORES: THE SUNG-THROUGH MUSICAL AS POSTMODERN .................. 238
   DEFINING PASTICHE IN POSTMODERNISM .......................................................... 241
   PASTICHE AND MUSICAL THEATER ................................................................. 244

CONCLUSION ........................................................................................................... 271

BIBLIOGRAPHY ....................................................................................................... 287

APPENDIX A. PLOT SUMMARIES ............................................................................ 295
APPENDIX B. INTERVIEWS WITH WILLIAM FINN .................................................... 303
APPENDIX C. INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL JOHN LACHIUSA .................................. 319
APPENDIX D. INTERVIEW WITH ANDREW LIPPA ............................................... 326
APPENDIX E. INTERVIEW WITH JEFFREY LUNDEN ............................................. 334
APPENDIX F. INTERVIEW WITH GALT MACDERMOT ......................................... 348
APPENDIX G. INTERVIEW WITH JEANINE TESORI .............................................. 358
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1. The eighteen songs from *In Trousers* in six phases .................................................. 46
Table 1.2. The twenty songs from *March of the Falsettos* in five phases ................................. 48
Table 1.3. The seventeen songs from *Falsettoland* in six phases .............................................. 51
Table 1.4. The thirty-two songs from *A New Brain* in three phases ......................................... 53
Table 1.5. The fourteen songs from *The Last Five Years* in fourteen scenes ........................... 58
Table 2.1. Form and structure of the song “Hello Again” ............................................................ 66
Table 2.2. Song sequence in Act I, Scene 1 of *Caroline, Or Change* ........................................ 69
Table 2.3. Song sequence in Act II, Scene 8 of *Caroline, or Change* ....................................... 70
Table 2.4. Embedded songs in four scenes of LaChiusa’s *Hello Again* ................................... 73
Table 2.5. Two embedded songs in the finale of *The Wild Party* .............................................. 75
Table 2.6. Song sequence in Act I, Scene 6 of *Caroline, or Change* ....................................... 83
Table 2.7. Two embedded songs in the finale of *Wings* ............................................................ 85
Table 2.8. Embedment of songs in Act I, Scene 3 of *The Wild Party* ...................................... 87
Table 2.9. Song vamps in *Rent* ...................................................................................................... 89
Table 6.1. Song order in *In Trousers*, original production, Playwright Horizons, February 21– March 18, 1979 ......................................................................................................................... 208
Table 6.2. Song order in *In Trousers*, Second Stage, February 12–March 7, 1981 ..................... 208
Table 6.3. Song order in *In Trousers*, Promenade Theater, March 26–April 7, 1985 .............. 209
Table 6.4. Song order in *A New Brain*, workshop, Clark Studio Theatre, Lincoln Center Institute, June 21–29, 1996 ......................................................................................................................... 226
Table 6.5. Song order in *A New Brain*, original production, Lincoln Center Theater at the Mitzi E. Newhouse, June 18–October 11, 1998 ................................................................. 226
Table 7.1. Musical style for each scene in *Hello Again* .............................................................. 248
Table 7.2. Songs from *Rent* and their instrumentation and style as indicated by Jonathan Larson

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Song</th>
<th>Instrumentation</th>
<th>Style</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

263
Introduction

In the 2015 Broadway musical *Something Rotten!*, the protagonist, Nick Bottom, seeks desperately to know what the future of Western theater will be so that he can beat his rival, William Shakespeare, in creating the next theatrical success in London of the 1590s. Bottom looks to Thomas Nostradamus, supposed nephew of the legendary sixteenth-century seer, who informs him that theater history will go through extraordinary transformations with the creation of musicals. Nostradamus explains that musicals “appear to be a play where the dialogue stops, and the plot is conveyed through songs.”\(^1\) Amongst his predictions, he foresees that some musicals will be sung from beginning to end. Nostradamus explains how these musicals will work: “There’s no talking and they often stay on one note for a very long time so that when they change to a different note, you notice. And it’s supposed to create a dramatic effect. But mostly you just sit there asking yourself, ‘why aren’t they talking?’”\(^2\) The joke relies on the fact that this song is itself a sung-dialogue in which Nostradamus changes the note of the patter when he sings about the audience noticing the change.

The creators of *Something Rotten!* invite musical theater audiences to laugh at the suspension of disbelief necessary to appreciate a story being told with the help of songs or even entirely through songs. The song described above, appropriately titled “A Musical,” pokes fun at the different forms that musical theater has taken to structure storytelling. The success of this

---


\(^2\) Ibid.
comic song depends on an audience member’s knowledge or familiarity with such forms and what makes musical theater a theatrical genre.

Indeed, the most typical subgenre of the American musical theater has been the book musical, in which songs interrupt spoken dialogue and provide additional means to depict the characters and the dramatic situations. Or, as Nick Bottom mocks it in *Something Rotten!*, “An actor is saying his lines and then, out of nowhere, he just starts singing.” The book musical started achieving supremacy in the American musical theater of the early 1940s, when the practice of combining storytelling with songs shifted focus to plot development and coherence, away from the practice of accommodating a performer’s talent in a weak plot that worked basically as an excuse for that talent to be displayed. Other forms of musical theater were still popular in that decade, such as revues and operettas, but such emphasis on enhancing the book of musical comedies “nurtured a new generation of talent who “integrated” in their own versatile performances the particular combination of acting, dancing, and singing that made the American musical theater so distinctive from other forms of lyric drama.” Between the 1940s and the 1970s, the book musical devised different ways of exploring the tensions between narrative and musical performance, developing a new type of “story-telling musical,” the musical play, while simultaneously renovating, or perhaps reinventing, musical comedy. In either of these

---

3 Ibid.

4 I do not mean that the book musical was entirely new in the 1940s. Musicals from before this decade had presented plots that did not focus solely on the display of a performer’s talent and featured effective plot development. However, this did not become common practice until the 1940s.


6 Larry Stempel explains how some musicals after 1940 can be categorized as musical play (such as *Oklahoma!* and *My Fair Lady*), while others prolonged the life of musical comedy (such as *Finian’s Rainbow* and *The Pajama Game*). Stempel also argues for the 1940s as a watershed decade in the development of the American musical. (Larry Stempel, *Showtime: A History of the Broadway Musical Theater* [New York: W. W. Norton, 2010], 293–311 and 419–58). I have borrowed the term “story-telling musicals” from page 4 of Stempel’s book. Kim
subgenres, the book musical has always presented a conspicuous alternation of songs and spoken dialogue. As composer Jerry Herman put it, “It is this rollercoaster between dialog and song, this homogenization of the spoken and the sung word, that makes a career in the theater so fascinating.”

It was not until the last quarter of the twentieth century that the second subgenre of musical that Nick and Nostradamus mock in *Something Rotten!*, the musical that is sung from beginning to end, came to prominence. Sung-through musicals distance their structures from those of the book musical precisely by changing that balance between talking and singing, creating musicals in which the entire script—monologues, conversations, turning points, asides—all occur in song.

This dissertation demonstrates that by reducing the amount of spoken dialogue and increasing the presence of music, American sung-through (and some virtually sung-through) musicals from 1979 until 2004 challenged the means of structuring musicals. This study investigates how creative teams of sung-through musicals (composers, lyricists, and book writers) have used songs alone to create and to communicate compelling dramaturgy, questioning the limits between singing and speaking in a dramatic setting. This study establishes how in sung-through musicals songs alone develop dramatic action and allow communication both between the characters on stage and between the characters and the audience. Kim Kowalke characterizes the traditional book musical of the Golden Age, which he dates from 1943 to 1968, as “a dramaturgical model relatively stable in its generic conventions and resistant to radical

---


alterations,” pointing out that “seldom did . . . risk-taking challenge the basic framework of the book musical.” This dissertation demonstrates that after 1980 alterations in the structure of musicals defined how the American musical theater progressed and developed toward the twenty-first century, challenging some of its own conventions.

I do not imply that sung-through musicals lack a book. Similar to all other forms of storytelling, sung-through musicals feature a dramatic arc that reveals how, where, and when a character goes from one situation to another, climaxing in an emotional point of the story. The difference lies in the structure of the book: instead of alternating between spoken dialogue and song, the book of a sung-through musical depends on a sequence of songs that creates and develops the dramatic action. The operatic term “libretto” could be used to define the scripts of sung-through musicals. However, I refrain from using it for two reasons. First, a libretto comprises everything that is sung in a vocal work, and as I demonstrate in this dissertation, not everything is sung in a sung-through musical. Second, in musical theater, lyric writing, book writing, and music composition are considered three different crafts that merge to form a new work. The term libretto comes from opera history; in musical theater history, the sung-through musical distinguishes itself by blurring the distinctions between lyrics and book, and book and score.


---


I established five criteria that led me to focus on these twelve musicals. First, I have considered musicals that are sung from beginning to end or, if they feature a few spoken lines, have music in all scenes, thus blurring the clear distinction between singing and speaking that characterizes the book musical. Second, I focus on musicals that date at least from 1979, not only because it was the time period when sung-through musicals became more popular on the American musical theater stage, but because the 1980s was a decade that saw so many cultural shifts that led American literary critic Fredric Jameson to argue that the United States had entered a new historical period, “one in which all kinds of things, from economics to politics, from the arts to technology, from daily life to international relations, had changed for good.” Third, each of these musicals was created by an *American* composer, dramatist, or lyricist. My study does not consider the British sung-through musicals that took Broadway by storm throughout that decade and into the 1990s, because those works have previously been studied. Fourth, each musical was produced in New York City’s Broadway or Off-Broadway circuits because these were the two main locales for musicals in the United States of the 1980s, as they had been in the 1960s and 1970s and have continued to be in the twentieth-first century. Last,

---

9 Michael John LaChiusa also wrote a musical titled *The Wild Party*, which opened on Broadway in the same season that Lippa’s opened Off-Broadway. I do not consider LaChiusa’s *The Wild Party* in this study.

10 See Appendix A for plot synopses.

11 The musical *In Trousers* opened in February of 1979, but the composer, William Finn, re-wrote it twice in the early 1980s.


14 My dissertation does not consider sung-through musicals composed for regional theaters throughout the United States or those composed in New York City’s Off-Off-Broadway circuit, such as *Charlotte Sweet* (1982).
each musical has a clear storyline or plot. Thus, my study does not consider revues, which are sung-through plot-less musicals whose songs either pertain to the same topic or are grouped in the same musical simply because they are by the same composer.\textsuperscript{15}

I have clearly omitted some important musicals of the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s. Musicals like Dreamgirls (1981), Passion (1994), Bring in ’da Noise, Bring in ’da Funk (1995), Side Show (1997), and Ragtime (1998) found at least one means to challenge the typical form of the book musical and blurred the line between speaking and singing. My dissertation is an empirical study on aesthetics, not a historical survey, an important distinction that explains why some musicals of that time period had to be omitted. However, I follow in the steps of Scott McMillin, author of an important study on the aesthetics of the book musical, and believe that those twelve musicals still produce “a historical trajectory underpinning the argument,” what McMillin terms a “historical silhouette.”\textsuperscript{16}

**Methodology**

I propose that songs form the basic structural element of a sung-through score, and communication occurs through a sequence of songs: an alignment and order of songs that create dramatic action and assume the functions of the dramatic structure, such as dialogues, monologues, and soliloquies. Such a sequence of songs forms the book of a sung-through musical. In the conventional book musical, songs are not the main unit that structure a scene because the musical depends on spoken dialogue, which originates before the songs. Sheldon

\textsuperscript{15} Musical revues from 1980s–2000s include Marry Me a Little (1981), Songs for a New World (1995), and Smokey Joe’s Café (1995).

Harnick, lyricist for musicals like *Fiorello!* and *Fiddler on the Roof*, has explained the process:

“[Composer] Jerry [Bock] and I prefer to have a draft of the libretto first, so that we can write the type of song that (in addition to being entertaining) attempts to continue the flow of the story, to provide insight into character, to heighten climatic moments, or to enrich the feeling of time and place.”

Mark Steyn has demonstrated that “the most common misconception is that the book-writer is responsible only for the dialogue scenes—for connecting up the bits between the songs—whereas, since Rodgers and Hammerstein, he’s been the guy who *enables* the numbers, framing the entire drama from which the songs spring.” Consequently, in the book musical, “the best song is only as good as its place in the drama, and what it has to say *about* that place in the drama.” Songs cannot form the main unit of the dramatic action in the book musical because scenes may dismiss them entirely and be structured in spoken dialogue alone, such as Act I, scenes 5 and 6 of *South Pacific*; Act I, scene 3 of *The Music Man*; and Act II, scene 3 of *Company*.

However, songs may still contribute to the segmentation of scenes in a book musical. Breaking into song may invite characters to the stage or bring a scene to a close. As the book musical developed, songs acquired critical places in the plot, and unlike the common practice from the first forty years of the twentieth century, during and after the Golden Age, songs could

---


18 Mark Steyn, *Broadway Babies Say Goodnight: Musicals Then and Now* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1997), 93.

19 Ibid., 88.

no longer be easily transferred from or to another musical, or replaced without having a drastic
musical have been transformed into musical scores. In a sung-through musical, a sequence of
song forms not just the score, but the entire dramatic action. This attribute of the sung-through
musical marks the basic principle related to the compositional process, structure, genre
aesthetics, and reception of the selected twelve musicals.

I intend to demonstrate that songs, as the main unit of dramatic action in a sung-through
musical, create dramatic communication and rely on the interrelations of two axes. On one hand,
I consider changes and innovations that the selected twelve musicals brought to the development
of the American musical theater as a group. Studying structural similarities between these
musicals reveals how American sung-through musicals challenge musical theater conventions
and establishes how they collectively contributed to the development of the American musical as
a genre. On the other hand, I consider changes that each musical went through during its
compositional process, rehearsal process, and tryout. A study of individual changes contrasts one
musical with another and establishes compositional techniques that fueled the development of
the sung-through aesthetic.

Part I, comprising the first three chapters of this dissertation, concerns my first aim:
structural similarities between the selected musicals. The first two chapters focus on how the
structure of the selected musicals challenge the conventions of the book musical. I demonstrate that the sequence of songs in sung-through musicals can occur in two ways: the song cycle and an embedded-song structure. In the former, considered in chapter 1, scenes and entire acts feature songs performed in succession, creating a narrative arc and telling a story. Each song is a closed structure (in textual and musical content), although intra-textual references may unify the score. This occurs in The Human Comedy, all of the William Finn musicals considered here (In Trousers, March of the Falsettos, Falsettoland, Falsettos, and A New Brain), and The Last Five Years. In the latter case, considered in chapter 2, scenes are formed with songs at their center, with recitative (or patter), brief spoken lines, underscoring, or chorus interventions circumscribing the songs. This occurs in Wings, Hello Again, Rent, The Wild Party, and Caroline, or Change. Such a structure makes these musicals nearly sung-through, but continuous music and ambiguity between singing and speaking blur the distinction between book and score.

Chapter 3 addresses the dramatic functions that songs acquire in these musicals. It demonstrates how the selected composers and book writers have subscribed and challenged conventional song types in musical theater songwriting (such as “I am” songs, reprises, story songs, diegetic songs) to create musicals that do not depend on spoken dialogue.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 in Part II concern individual musicals that helped develop the sung-through aesthetic within the American musical theater tradition. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 investigate the choices that the individual creative teams made in the song sequence of their respective musicals. Chapter 4 focuses on nine songs from five of the selected musicals. I discuss the changes made to their content while they remained in the same place of the song sequence throughout the compositional process. Chapter 5 explores internal changes of songs that occupied different parts of the plot throughout the compositional process. The chapter delineates
the reasons for and consequences of changing these songs’ position in the sequence. It also considers songs that were cut and/or replaced during the compositional process of five of the musicals. Chapter 6 investigates alterations made to the ordering and shuffling of songs in three of the musicals (In Trousers, Rent, and A New Brain). My research reveals that song shuffling in these musicals specifically altered the linearity of their narratives, produced different versions of the plots, and reflect the composers’ struggles to refine and clarify subplots. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 together demonstrate how changes made to specific songs throughout a musical’s compositional process (shuffling, adding, cutting, or replacing) affected and shaped the creation of sung-through dramatic action. Thus, while Part I considers the “final” or licensed versions of the selected musical, Part II considers their compositional processes, before they reached a “final” or definitive version.22

The third part of this dissertation considers the sung-through musical and postmodernism. Chapter 7 demonstrates that five of the selected musicals (The Human Comedy, Hello Again, Rent, The Wild Party, and Caroline, or Change) rely on pastiche. These musicals’ composers collected different genres of popular music (such as rock, country, blues, gospel), adapted them, and mixed with their own compositional styles to serve dramatic purposes, creating pastiche. I argue that these musicals subscribe to postmodernism’s tenets because their composers have utilized pastiche as means of expression and communication. Using literary critic Fredric Jameson’s conceptualization of pastiche in postmodern art, I demonstrate how this trend of

22 Bruce Kirle argues that musicals are always “open texts,” i.e., works that do not achieve a definitive form and thus “preclude the ultimate authority of the text.” (Bruce Kirle, Unfinished Show Business: Broadway Musicals as Works-In-Process [Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005], 7). Indeed, William Finn and Andrew Lippa revised A New Brain and The Wild Party, respectively, in the summer of 2015 for the New York City Center’s summer series Encore! Off-Center, considerably altering these musicals’ structure and endings. I consider the form and structure that the selected musicals appear in their rental materials as their “final” version. For both parts I and II, I also consider how the selected musicals were presented in the opening night of their original production. Musicals such as The Human Comedy and Caroline, or Change went through changes when they moved from Off-Broadway to Broadway, and I consider these changes in Part II.
referencing popular music in a sung-through structure has allowed musical theater to enter and thrive in what Jameson calls postmodernity.

All of my arguments, observations, and conclusions are based on musical and dramatic analyses of the selected musicals. I also researched their conception and reception at the Billy Rose Theater division of the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts and at the Library of Congress, and personally interviewed six of the eight selected composers (Finn, LaChiusa, Lippa, Lunden, MacDermot, and Tesori).\textsuperscript{23}

**Literature Review**

American sung-through musicals have received little scholarly attention. Scott McMillin’s *The Musical as Drama* presents the best discussion of the aesthetics of the musical to date. He writes in his preface that he seeks to discuss “the principles and conventions that lie behind the best-known shows” and to “bring the musical before us as an aesthetic entity.”\textsuperscript{24} McMillin refutes the commonly accepted theory that post-1940 musical theater “integrates” spoken dialogue, songs, and dance. For him, when characters find themselves performing one of these elements, the others are discontinued. Songs depict or illustrate what has already been stated or mentioned in the book through spoken dialogue. Thus, musical numbers repeat in music what the book has already made clear, and such repetition results in a form of expression that the book alone does not have and which nonmusical plays are forced to achieve through other means. It is this alternation that “gives the musical its lift, its energy, its elation.”\textsuperscript{25} The only way

\textsuperscript{23} For transcriptions of all of these interviews, see Appendixes B, C, D, E, F, and G.

\textsuperscript{24} McMillin, ix.

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 33.
integration may happen is when the book and a musical number occur simultaneously. Then, “the number has overtaken the book, turning book time into number time and making the drama occur through the spread of song and dance.” He cites as examples “The Surrey with Fringes on Top” from Oklahoma! and “A Weekend in the Country” from A Little Night Music. I take McMillin’s argument that musical numbers overtake the book as the springboard for my own analyses of sung-through musicals.

McMillin refers to the structure of sung-through musicals in his book, but he focuses solely on sung-through musicals that came from London during the 1980s, The Phantom of the Opera, Les Misérables, and Miss Saigon, and associates their form with their reliance on stagecraft. He argues: “This kind of musical dodges the challenges and opportunities offered by the genre. Contemporary shows written in through-sung mode . . . resort to the wonders of stage technology in order to preserve the illusion of a seamless whole.” McMillin does not consider American sung-through musicals and how they challenge the standards of the book musical. As I demonstrate in this dissertation, dramatic structure in American sung-through musicals occurs without resorting to the wonders of stage technology.

Two studies have mentioned and discussed the form of sung-through musicals, albeit not with the depth of this study. An appeal for the necessity of a study on sung-through musicals was first issued by musicologist Stephen Banfield in his pioneering book on Sondheim’s Broadway Musicals. Banfield writes that a comparative study between musicals “with spoken dialogue at a

26 Ibid., 80.

27 Ibid., 170.

28 The only American musical that McMillin includes as an example of a sung-through musical that relies more on stagecraft than singing to convey the story is The Lion King. This is an erroneous assertion since this musical is not sung-through, but switches from spoken dialogue to musical numbers in the very tradition of the book musical. Ibid.
premium” and the all-sung musicals “is yet another urgent need not met by [his] book.”

29 He invites readers and prospective researchers of opera and musical theater to acknowledge that in the spectrum between all-sung opera and all-spoken drama, we find “opera with ballet, opera with spoken dialogue, the book musical, the film musical, the revue, the play with incidental music, and . . . all create their phenomenology of presentation.”

30 He also points out that there is more that we can learn about “melopoetics, the relationship between music and verbal text” and “not just a taxonomy but a theory of song” than his book proposes. Indeed, this dissertation considers the relationship between music and text and investigates song types in order to demonstrate how the American sung-through musical creates its own phenomenology of presentation.

Jessica Sternfeld’s *The Megamusical* remains to date the only other scholarly study of sung-through musicals. She focuses on British musicals that took Broadway by storm in the 1980s and early 1990s and argues that the sung-through quality of these musicals is one of the attributes that make them “mega” (alongside the visual spectacle in the original productions). She writes that a megamusical “has little or no spoken dialogue” and is structured as a “combination of set of songs, linking and transitional material, and recitative-like material.”

32 Through analyses of the scores of *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Cats*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, and *Les Misérables*, she demonstrates which “materials” structure these musicals as sung-through.

Sternfeld considers American megamusicals only when her argument moves to musicals of the 1990s. She includes cursory passages on *Jekyll and Hyde*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *The Lion*.

---


30 Ibid., 7.

31 Ibid.

32 Sternfeld, 2.
King, Ragtime, Rent, The Producers, and Wicked. However, her argument reveals that these musicals fit her megamusical aesthetics more because of their reliance on visual spectacle than their use of the sung-through format. Out of these musicals, only Rent has a sung-through score. My study differs from Sternfeld’s by focusing on the American tradition of musical theater and studying how American composers, lyricists, and book writers challenged this tradition with sung-through musicals that were created during the same time period but did not rely on spectacular staging.

Ethan Mordden’s book The Happiest Corpse I’ve Ever Seen and Barry Singer’s Ever After, both published in 2004, cover roughly the same twenty-five years that I focus on in this dissertation, 1979–2004. Both authors depart from the argument that during these three decades musical theater died out in American culture, since it moved away from the tradition established during the Golden Age. Mordden discusses Broadway musicals from 1978 to 2003. He focuses on the successful ones and highlights the means through which they adopted or challenged conventions. Singer covers the years 1977–2003 on Broadway and Off-Broadway, expanding essays that he wrote for The New York Times in the late 1990s. Both Mordden and Singer provide cursory entries or paragraphs on selected musicals, which are more descriptive and anecdote-laden than argumentative or insightful. Neither author considers the sung-through musical individually as a phenomenon, although they mention when a musical fits the label and is indicative of the time period. Lacking scholarly research and loaded with personal opinions, these books are journalistic criticism, not academic scholarship that search for cultural or historical meaning of the American musical during this time period.

---

Both Larry Stempel and Miranda Lundskaer-Nielsen cover how musicals after the 1980s have challenged the genre. Four of the composers selected for my study appear in Stempel’s book under the term “Sondheim’s Children,” i.e., composers for whom “the work of Stephen Sondheim has become the touchstone.”

Stempel writes that Jonathan Larson, Jeanine Tesori, Michael John LaChiusa, and Jason Robert Brown “dramatize complex and mature subject matter with sophisticated musical means.” However, Stempel claims that because of the differences that mark these composers’ musical styles, no school of composition can be specified, they only share the time period in which they compose under Sondheim’s influence. In my study, I suggest that composing sung-through musicals marks a connection between these composers. With his or her own individual musical style, each has created a musical that certainly sounds different from one another, but they all tell stories with the same sung-through format, develop the action from song to song, eschew spoken dialogue, and challenge the conventions of the book musical.

Stempel offers just one comment regarding sung-through musicals, but similar to Scott McMillin, he, too, connects them with the British craze for megamusicals that arrived on Broadway after 1970. Focusing on Lloyd Webber’s *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *Evita*, Stempel explains that these are “through-composed” musicals because “they are consisted entirely of back-to-back musical numbers” and they can be labeled opera “less for the ever-presence of music in them than for the ever-absence of a book.” Stempel never extends this discussion and terminology to American sung-through musicals and composers. Moreover, to write that these

---

34 Stempel, 670.
35 Ibid., 676.
36 Ibid., 615.
musicals are “through-composed” implies that the musicals do not include internal repetitions, which is usually not the case.\footnote{The term “through-composed” is better applied to songs in which the composer provides new music for each stanza or strophe.}

In Directors and the New Musical Drama: British and American Musical Theater in the 1980s and 90s,\footnote{Miranda Lundskaer-Nielsen, Directors and the New Musical Drama: British and American Musical Theatre in the 1980s and 90s (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).} Miranda Lundskaer-Nielsen argues why musicals of these decades deserve closer investigation:

We might usefully look at the musical theater of the 1980s and 90s as a number of different artistic impulses and try to develop a more precise vocabulary that reflects the artistry and cultural origins of individual shows. By looking beyond the traditional Broadway-centric narrative of musical theater developments, we can start to see the 1980s and 90s as a time of broadening horizons, dramatic innovation, and formal experimentation in which the musical became a meeting point for a number of different theater traditions.\footnote{Ibid., 6.}

Her main thesis is to define what she terms “musical drama” as a subgenre of British and American musical theater. This is “a group of shows that has as much basis in contemporary theater as it does in the traditions of the Golden Age Broadway musical.”\footnote{Ibid.} She discusses that this subgenre occurred through the advancement of the so-called “director’s theater.” She argues that beginning in the 1980s, directors of musical theater have reshaped it both by creating new shows and reviving others from before 1980. She also argues that musical theater scholarship has ignored directors in the historical narrative of the genre. She discusses theatrical techniques and approaches of Harold Prince (whom she considers a pre-musical drama director, since most of his innovative works date from before 1980), Trevor Nunn, John Caird, Nicholas Hytner, James
Lapine, George C. Wolfe, Tina Landau, Sam Mendes, Matthew Warchus, and David Leveaux. These are directors who came from text-based theater, and this is why they succeeded in innovating musical theater. The sung-through format and communicating in song, however, do not find a place in Lundskaer-Nielsen’s argument. She never mentions music, and the composer’s role is barely mentioned in her discussion.

The methodology for my study is empirical, relying on observation and interpretation of those twelve musicals’ structures, and “not only on observation but also on the incorporation of observation within patterns of investigation involving generalization and explanation.”41 This empirical method derives from Joseph Kerman’s *Opera as Drama*.42 The book is organized chronologically, but Kerman discusses the relationships that exist between early Baroque opera, *opera seria*, *opera buffa*, Mozart’s operas, grand opera, Wagner’s operas, Debussy’s *Pélles and Mélisande*, twelve-tone opera, and Neo-Classic opera by focusing on how music creates dramatic action. He demonstrates how different operas, from different time periods and countries, generate and organize dramatic action, and Kerman explains how one type of opera developed out of its predecessors. His book exposes the cultural meaning that opera has acquired in the Western world focusing on the creative processes of some of the most productive opera composers in history. His narrative does not prioritize society, reception history, gender, or class, but concentrates on how music as a dramatic tool unifies the selected operas. I intend with my dissertation to follow Kerman’s approach. By comparing and contrasting the twelve American

---


sung-through musicals, I study the relations that exist between their songs, producing a greater understanding of how sung-through musicals create drama.

My dissertation’s topic also borders on two books that have discussed the conventions and expectations of musical theater’s songs and their categorization. Lehman Engel, a conductor of Broadway musicals during the Golden Age, wrote The American Musical Theater, probably the first book to discuss and explain the principles used in the creation of a Broadway musical.43 Engel examined “certain working principles [of the musical] . . . imposed by the nature of the genre.”44 Focusing on musicals that alternate spoken dialogue with songs from the period 1940–1973, from Pal Joey to A Little Night Music, he considers in detail the elements of a musical (such as opening number and musical scenes). Engel discusses the ways in which a book musical presents sharp and interesting contrasts through its musical numbers. “Such contrasts will depend on the kinds of songs that follow one another, their moods, their subject matter, and the characters who sing them.”45 He then proposes six kinds of songs that composers and directors must combine when creating the program of a show: AABA songs, ballads, rhythm songs, comedy songs, charm songs, and musical scenes. His definitions, however, are cursory. He argues that “People Will Say We’re in Love” from Oklahoma! is a ballad simply because it is about love.46 Its form, however, fits the AABA structure, and Engel does not specify why and how one song can belong to multiple categories. Moreover, he never explains how the various

44 Ibid., 35.
45 Ibid., 105.
46 Ibid., 106.
songs that he provides as examples for a specific category represent the song type he is discussing.

Richard Kislan’s *The Musical: A Look at the American Musical Theater* improved on Engel’s observations. Similar to Engel, Kislan considers Golden-Age musicals that alternate spoken dialogue and music, and discusses the book of a musical, the lyrics, the score, the choreography, and the set design individually. Kislan explains which characteristics comprise an opening number, a patter song, a rhythm song, a chorus number, a musical scene, and a reprise. His employment of theater terminology and conventions, such as “I am” and “I want” songs, and the “eleven o’clock” number, enhances his descriptions of what defines each of these categories. However, Kislan presents a prescriptive theory of the musical, presenting the song types first, then examples that appropriately fit his theory. Also, his personal experience and tastes guide his interpretations of the history and elements of the musical, reducing history to passing anecdotes and presenting a “how-to” book whose main point is not to study musical theater as a genre, but to train the reader to understand the process of creating a musical.

The study of the American musical’s use of pastiche as representative of postmodernism has received no scholarly attention. However, musical theater scholarship has investigated the two topics, pastiche and postmodernism, separately. Jessica Sternfeld in her study of the megamusical explained that this kind of musical “feature[s] ballads tinged with pop, country, blues, or cabaret influences; they also offer hard driving up-tempo numbers, songs in a nearly rock and roll style, and love duets that could work just as well in the movies or on television as they do onstage. All these appear alongside quasi-operatic ensembles and purely theatrical

---

Sternfeld discusses the combination of different musical styles in British musicals that were successful on Broadway, especially those composed by Andrew Lloyd Webber. Even if the megamusical went through some aesthetic modifications in the 1990s and then again after 2000 (one difference, she argues, is that they no longer were sung-through), the use of pastiche remained crucial to this subgenre of musical theater.

Joseph Swain analyzed the scores of fifteen musicals in his book The Broadway Musical. Swain argues that modern composers’ use of pastiche “operates at a distance from the listener, like poetry in translation.” His strongest point on the topic of pastiche links it to musical theater composers of the Golden Age. Swain argues that they used pastiche without abandoning aspects of Tin Pan Alley compositions and thus left “just a hint of the anachronism” created by the effect, such as the madrigal in Cole Porter’s score for Kiss Me, Kate and the tango in Frederic Loewe’s score for My Fair Lady.

Robert McLaughlin argues that musical theater entered the postmodern era through the works of Stephen Sondheim. McLaughlin focuses on dramatic structure, not the composer’s musical style or musical choices. He claims, “The skepticism many of Sondheim’s plays hold toward narrative as a means of structuring and containing meaning . . . , which is shared by much of the drama and fiction of the postmodern era, functions in many of the plays Sondheim and his collaborators presented from the 1970s into the twenty-first century to challenge the dominance of narrative as an aesthetic, epistemological, and ontological structure.”

---

48 Sternfeld, 94.


50 Ibid., 419.

Sondheim’s musicals explore the flexibility of narrative structure by fracturing it and thus subverting the book musical established by the works of Sondheim’s mentor, Oscar Hammerstein II. McLaughlin argues that in Company, Follies, and Merrily We Roll Along the lack of a linear or progressive narrative, and the use of “sketches, songs, and dances, presented one after the other in no chronologically or causally determined sequence” mirrors the protagonists’ identity crisis caused by their own failed narratives that never reach the expected happy ending.  

Thus, I concur with McLaughlin’s finding that challenging the structure of the book musical marked a fundamental step in the development of the American musical during the postmodern era.  

However, for McLaughlin, pastiche songs form just one element that make Sondheim’s plays self-referential, calling “attention to [the plays’] own theatricality and artificiality,” one that is added to the plays’ sets and costumes, and “high-powered, showbusiness performances.” With his focus on the musicals’ dramaturgy, McLaughlin does not explore what “pastiche songs” mean or entail, or even how Sondheim’s musical style incorporates them. 

These three authors’ studies, Sternfeld’s, Swain’s, and McLaughlin’s, broke new ground in musical theater scholarship. However, a collective summary of these studies reveals that the field has lacked an

---

52 Ibid., 31. McLaughlin’s description of these musicals’ narratives (or lack thereof) is the same as the definition of the concept musical, but he does not link his argument to this form of musical. For a definition of the concept musical, see Bruce D. Mcclung, Lady in the Dark: Biography of a Musical (New York: Oxford University Press), 163–66.


54 McLaughlin, 31.

55 Sondheim’s use of pastiche has also received attention in Stephen Banfield’s Sondheim Broadway Musicals, 133–38 and 196–201.
investigation of the American musical theater’s contribution to postmodernism and its aesthetic changes during this era.
PART I
Dramatic Action
and the Structure of Sung-Through Musicals
Chapter 1

Song-Through Musicals that Employ a Song-Cycle Structure

Analyses of drama always identify portions of a play that provide cohesion to the plot. Entrances or exits of characters, changes of scenery, the lowering/raising of the curtain, blackouts, intermission, scenes, and acts all indicate how a plot can be segmented.¹ In sung-through musicals, spoken dialogue has been virtually eliminated, if not avoided altogether; therefore I argue that songs in a sung-through musical become the main unit of the dramatic action, and a sequence of songs measure and establish other segments, such as entrances and exits of characters, and division of scenes and acts. My research and analyses of American sung-through musicals have led me to propose that this sequence of songs may occur either in a song cycle structure or in an embedded-song structure.

In this chapter I demonstrate that a song sequence in a song-cycle structure features songs performed in succession creating a narrative arch and telling a story. This happens in seven of the twelve sung-through musicals considered in this dissertation: The Human Comedy, In Trousers, March of the Falsettos, Falsettoland, Falsettos, A New Brain, and The Last Five Years.² I divide my discussion in two parts. First, I demonstrate that the song-cycle structure was rooted in the inception of these works. Second, I discuss the different ways that the creative teams of these musicals ordered songs to generate, develop, and provide cohesion to the dramatic action.


² The other five musicals selected for this study feature their song sequence in an embedded-song structure and are considered separately in chapter 2. See Appendix A for plot synopses.
Song cycles present a set of related songs that form a musical entity with a narrative arc. Several attributes in both music and text establish the relations that articulate the cyclic aspect of these works. Unifying textual principles may include the setting of poems derived from a single poet, poems that create a narrative, poems that concern the same idea or concept, or poems that depict a single mood. Unifying musical principles include recurring motives, themes, or entire musical passages; a tonal scheme; and cross-references in the harmonic design. The cohesiveness of song cycles, which become evident when all of the songs in the cycle are performed in succession, also occurs in some sung-through musicals. In the absence of spoken dialogue, this cohesiveness becomes essential to the development of the plot.

This structural similarity between some sung-through musicals and song cycles is the only correlation I intend to make. Song cycles have unique aspects—their own aesthetics—that are not applicable to the American sung-through musical. Song cycles often grant the listener the opportunity to contemplate the poetry of a particular poet, who in most cases penned the poems without the intention of having them set to music (the poet’s craftsmanship antedates the composer’s). In sung-through musicals, the lyrics of the book writer/lyricist will be set to music, and it is not unheard of in sung-through musicals for the book writer, lyricist, and composer to be the same person (such as William Finn for In Trousers, Michael John LaChiusa for Hello Again, and Jason Robert Brown for The Last Five Years). Song cycles usually present the narrative from the protagonist’s perspective. The singer embodies the “I” of the poems, and such “emphasis on individual expression has become one of the defining features of the song cycle as a genre.”

This protagonist mentions other characters and describes their actions, but they are never seen.

---


4 In Schubert’s Die schöne Müllerin, for example, the story is told through the perspective of the miller boy, who then mentions the other characters (the brook, the girl, and the hunter). (Laura Tunbridge, Song Cycles,
In sung-through musicals, we experience the story from several characters’ perspective. Even if the protagonist tells the story, other characters are physically present and active on stage. Finally, composers of song cycles provide settings whose musical power of expression equals the weight with that of the poetry. Romantic writers, such as August Wilhelm Schlegel and Johann Gottfried Herder, maintained that composers should heighten the poet’s voice. However, this close relationship between musical setting and text (and the attendant dramatic implications) can be relevant to other genres as well, such as sixteenth-century madrigals and all forms of opera.⁵

**Inception**

The inception of these seven musicals informs how and why they ended up structured with a sequence of songs as in a song cycle. Finn created the musicals of his Marvin trilogy, *In Trousers*, *March of the Falsettos*, and *Falsettoland*, out of songs, not from a book with spoken dialogue. He composed some songs to begin the process for each musical, and as the story became clear in his head and he structured the plot (through a partnership with director James Lapine for *March of the Falsettos* and *Falsettoland*), he composed additional songs to fill in dramatic gaps and enhance the plot. Finn has admitted that he is not a playwright and lacks the skills to structure a plot: “I [don’t] know how to write a book, that’s why I [write] all sung. It’s not like I wanted to write all sung.”⁶

---

⁵ “Musical theater song cycles” or “Broadway song cycles” (since the composers also write Broadway musicals) exist, but these are not acted out dramatically on a stage, and no staging of scenery or costumes are necessary. In addition, they do not feature a plot. Examples include Maury Yeston’s *December Songs* (1991) and Finn’s *Elegies* (2003).

In Trousers began as a collection of songs that Finn performed with Mary Testa, Kay Passick, and Allison Frasier in the living room of his New York apartment in the late 1970s. The three women would arrive at Finn’s apartment, cook together, and, in Finn’s words: “As the chicken wings were cooking, I’d write something that we could rehearse. And that’s how that show started.” The women helped Finn devise the lyrics for the songs and the characters who would sing them. This is why the musical features four characters: one man (Marvin) and three women (Marvin’s wife, his high-school sweetheart, and Miss Goldberg, one of Marvin’s high school teachers). Finn first wrote “Marvin’s Giddy Seizures,” which according to the composer, “is the worst song in In Trousers, it doesn’t do anything . . . I kept it because it was the first song. And what I found out was that Mary and Alison harmonized naturally . . . . It made it sound so much better.” This prompted Finn to compose additional songs about the Marvin character he had created and the women in his life. His musical slowly became

a bunch of cabaret songs called In Trousers and that was for three women and a man. And it was about a petulant guy named Marvin. Whenever things got too hot for him, he’d revert back to himself when he was fourteen, just kind of childish, hysterical guy. He was leaving his wife for a man. He was having these fantasies about men. He didn’t know how to deal with them . . . . So whenever things would get hot for him, he would leave. That developed into the first of these Marvin shows.

In the early performances of In Trousers in Finn’s living room, he played piano and borrowed chairs from the Jewish temple on 100th street to accommodate his audience. Andre Bishop, artistic director of Playwright Horizons, an Off-Broadway theater, attended one of these performances.

---

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.


performances. Playwright Horizons was in the process of founding a musical theater lab.

Similarly to what they had done with spoken drama, this lab would offer the opportunity for composers, lyricists, and book writers to develop, workshop, and eventually stage their musicals. Playwright Horizons’s musical theater director, Ira Weitzman, attended a subsequent performance at Finn’s apartment and offered to workshop *In Trousers* in Playwright Horizons’s new musical theater lab.\(^{11}\) Kay Passick, who played Marvin’s high-school sweetheart, left the project when it moved to Playwright Horizons and was replaced by Joanna Green. Finn, who had until then sung Marvin, decided to direct the production, and Chip Zien was cast to play the protagonist. This production opened first as a workshop on December 8, 1978 and played 8 performances. It re-opened on February 21, 1979 and ran until March 18.\(^{12}\)

Unlike the next two Marvin musicals in the trilogy, the original production of *In Trousers* had no outside stage director to question or comment on Finn’s choices in structuring the musical’s book. Finn admitted: “I didn’t know that that would appeal to anyone. I thought that these were just quirky little songs that my friends and I would enjoy and that would be it. But things obviously take on a life of their own.”\(^{13}\) Indeed, although critics embraced Finn’s songs and his musical style, they panned the musical’s structure. Michael Feingold wrote, “the piece . . . has virtually no script, and Finn’s lyrics either wander elliptically all over the verbal map, or repeat themselves till they make Gertrude Stein look like a model of concision.”\(^{14}\) *The New York*

\(^{11}\) For an account of these events from Ira Weitzman’s perspective, see Barry Singer, *Ever After: The Last Years of Musical Theater and Beyond* (New York: Applause, 2004), 11–17.

\(^{12}\) Barry Singer mistakenly writes that the December 1978 run played 28 performances (Barry Singer, *Ever After*, 14).

\(^{13}\) William Finn, interview by Ruth Simon, June 6, 1993.

Times critic described the musical as “eighteen songs and a few barely suggested sketches setting out the fantasies and worries of a fourteen-year-old boy named Marvin.”\textsuperscript{15} Subsequently, In Trousers was revived Off-Broadway and considerably rewritten twice during the 1980s: at Second Stage Theatre in 1981 and at the Promenade Theater in 1985.\textsuperscript{16} In both rewritings, Finn maintained the song-cycle structure.

Shortly after In Trousers closed, director James Lapine started a workshop of his new play, Table Settings, at Playwright Horizons. Andre Bishop wanted Finn to work with Lapine and suggested that the composer go to see Table Settings. After Finn watched it, he said to Bishop: “‘I love the show, but I love the direction.’ It was directed like a musical, and I felt it was really beautiful. And [Bishop] said, ‘Well, that’s who I want you to work with.’ He got us together.”\textsuperscript{17} Finn and Lapine worked together to create a one-act musical sequel to In Trousers. They maintained the two named characters from In Trousers, Marvin and Whizzer, decided that Whizzer was going to be present onstage, named Marvin’s wife Trina, and concluded that Marvin’s high school sweetheart and Miss Goldberg could be omitted.

Similar to In Trousers, Finn conceived March of the Falsettos out of songs. The first song that Finn wrote for the musical was “Four Jews in a Room Bitching,” which became the working title. Lapine said that he would not direct a musical with such a title, so Finn renamed the musical “The Pettiness of Misogyny,” which emphasized Marvin’s relationship with his now ex-wife.\textsuperscript{18} After Finn composed a second song for the show, “March of the Falsettos,” the


\textsuperscript{16} I compare and contrast the structures of the three incarnations of In Trousers in chapter 6. Finn considers the 1985 version to be definitive, and it is now available for rental.

\textsuperscript{17} William Finn, interview by author, New York, NY, May 21, 2013.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
composer and director settled on this title for the musical and expanded the idea of the falsetto range in the male voice as a metaphor for masculinity. Finn recalls: “I was just walking around and thought a march of falsettos was funny! I didn't know exactly what it was, but I just thought it was funny, and I wrote, ‘march, march, march of the falsettos. Who is man enough to march the march of the falsettos.’”\(^{19}\) Regarding this choice for the title of the song and eventually the musical, Finn has explained: “Falsetto is a voice normally outside the normal range . . . and I thought these people [the characters] were outside the normal range. . . . I felt these were people whose situation was outside the normal range of most people’s situation, and so I thought that falsettos kind of, in a vocal way, explained that.”\(^{20}\) Lapine gathered the few songs that Finn had composed and organized them into a plot. Finn has described his and Lapine’s method of storyboarding: “[Lapine] said ‘these are the songs you have’ and he put them on index cards—the title of the songs and what they were about. Then we got a board and he started plotting.”\(^{21}\)

Finn composed songs for *March of the Falsettos* as he and Lapine discussed the plot and dramatic moments. According to Finn, “almost the whole show was written during the rehearsals” because “Lapine suggested things, and they would change everything, and so I would have to rewrite everything.”\(^{22}\) Actor Stephen Bogardus claimed that “about a quarter of the material came in the last ten days before our first public performance.”\(^{23}\) It was Lapine who

\(^{19}\) Ibid.


\(^{22}\) William Finn, interview by author, New York, NY, May 21, 2013.

\(^{23}\) Quoted in Bell, *Broadway Stories*, 22.
suggested that Marvin and Trina’s son, who is just mentioned in *In Trousers*, should actively participate in the drama. The boy was named Jason, and Finn composed all of his songs after Lapine created dramatic situations and conflicts for the character. In the composer’s words:

*Falsettos* was 60% me, 40% Lapine. I’m not good at structure, and we have to face up to our strengths and weaknesses, and I was lucky that when I had to face up to my structural deficiencies, Lapine was right there to supplement all of it. . . . I get stuck, and when I get stuck, I get stuck, I don’t write for three days . . . and Lapine gets you unstuck, he has the most fertile mind of anyone I’ve ever met. And he says, “Well, if that doesn’t work, what about this, what about this?” It’s all coming from a very clear place. . . . Lapine is very clear-headed.24

Lapine’s participation in the creative process for *March of the Falsettos* produced a more cohesive musical than *In Trousers*, but one still comprised of songs alone. Finn concludes: “I find writing the songs very simple. What I find harder is deciding what the song is going to be about. So when you’re working with Lapine he can help you decide what the song is going to be about, and then I can write the songs easily.”25

*March of the Falsettos* opened on May 20, 1981 at Playwright Horizons, where it ran until September 26. It then transferred to another Off-Broadway theater, the Westside Theater, where in played 268 performances between October 13, 1981 and January 31, 1982. The musical featured nineteen songs that told the story of Marvin’s struggles to come to terms with his ex-wife, son, and male lover. One critic’s reaction to this musical reveals how Finn’s second musical and first commercial success challenged the conventions of the American musical theater:

We seem not to have words in our current vocabulary to easily label [Finn’s musical]. Both [*March of the*] *Falsettos* and *In Trousers*, [Finn’s] first work, are a collection of continuously performed songs with no dialogue between. To call it operetta suggests a formalism and stodginess that would rob Finn’s work of its vitality, and to say it’s a rock


opera is too limiting of his musical diversity. Finn has created a popular, accessible, and classy contemporary musical idiom as the framework for his story.\textsuperscript{26}

The period after \textit{March of the Falsettos} and before \textit{Falsettoland}, the third and last musical in the Marvin trilogy, was a productive one for Lapine, but not for Finn. In 1982 Lapine met composer Stephen Sondheim, also at Playwright Horizons, with whom he created \textit{Sunday in the Park With George} (Playwright Horizons, 1983, transferred to Broadway in 1984) and \textit{Into the Woods} (opened on Broadway in 1987). Finn, on the other hand, struggled with his new musical, \textit{Romance in Hard Times}. Initially titled “America Kicks Up Its Heels,” the musical originated at Playhouse Horizons, where it played twenty-eight performances from March 3 to 27, 1983. Finn wrote music and lyrics for this book musical, which told the story of a pregnant woman during the Great Depression who refused to give birth until the world became a better and safer place.\textsuperscript{27} It was presented Off-Broadway in Joseph Papp’s Public Theater New York Shakespeare Festival from May 31 to June 18, 1989, followed by six performances between November 14 and December 17, 1989. Finn rewrote the book for this second version of the musical as well as some new songs. Some of the actors were acclaimed for their performances, but the critics panned both of these productions claiming that the plot was confusing, the characters not well developed, and the songs not as witty and dramatically effective as they expected from the composer of \textit{March of the Falsettos}. The critical reception frustrated Finn, who gave up the project after seven years of extensive work.\textsuperscript{28}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{26} Terry Helbing, review of \textit{March of the Falsettos}, by William Finn and James Lapine, Playwright Horizons, New York, \textit{The New York Native}, August 10, 1981.

\textsuperscript{27} The book was by Charles Rubin.

\textsuperscript{28} William Finn, interview by author, New York, NY, May 21, 2013. Finn revisited the score for \textit{Romance in Hard Times} when it received a new workshop production at the Barrington Stage Company in Pittsfield, Massachusetts from August 14 to 31, 2014. This third version of the musical featured a re-imagined book by Rachel Sheinkin, with whom Finn had created his only commercially successful book musical in 2004, \textit{The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee}.
\end{flushright}
Finn returned to Playwright Horizons, as the theater had agreed to produce the third musical in the Marvin trilogy, then titled *Jason’s Bar Mitzvah*. Finn and Lapine thought that Marvin’s story needed closure (one of the characters even sings at the beginning that “this story needs an ending”), and the original idea was to set the final story around Marvin’s family preparing for Jason’s bar mitzvah. However, by the end of the decade, Finn and Lapine thought that the AIDS pandemic in the gay community could not be ignored. Moved by the situation, Finn and Lapine created a musical that portrays daily life (and the preparations for Jason’s bar mitzvah) in the age of AIDS, even if the pandemic is never named. Script readings for the new musical began in 1988, and in the following year a workshop called *Marvin’s Songs* presented *March of the Falsettos* in conjunction with some songs for the new musical.29 Now titled *Falsettoland*, the third musical in the Marvin trilogy opened at Playwright Horizons on June 28, 1990 and closed on August 2. Its success prompted a transfer to another Off-Broadway theater, the Lucile Lortel Theater on Christopher Street, where it opened on September 25, 1990 and ran for 176 performances, closing on January 27, 1991.

Finn and Lapine had created the one-act *Falsettoland* with the intention of pairing it with *March of the Falsettos* in a double bill. Lapine had thought it was better to present it “solo” first so that Finn would not be criticized for having written just half of a musical.30 Familiar with Finn’s challenges with structure, Lapine continued the creative process that they had devised during *March of the Falsettos*: he plotted most of the story himself and then asked Finn to compose the songs. Lapine has confirmed his role in this partnership: “My strong suit is structure. That’s what I bring to the table. I contribute to storyline and character. I give [Finn]

29 Bell, 19.

30 William Finn, interview by author, New York, NY, June 8, 2015.
feedback and sometimes ask him to write a new song. But he writes all the words and music.”  

An example that illustrates their collaboration in *Falsettoland* is the racquetball scene, which occurs in the middle of the song “A Day in Falsettoland.” Lapine created and staged the racquetball game first and subsequently requested Finn to write music to accompany it. In *March of the Falsettos*, the protagonists had played chess. In *Falsettoland*, Lapine chose racquetball as a metaphor for the competition in Marvin and Whizzer’s relationship. Finn reused an ostinato that repeated scale degrees 1,5,6,5 in staccato, which represented Trina chopping vegetables for dinner in “This Had Better Come to a Stop” in *March of the Falsettos*, to now represent the ball as Marvin and Whizzer play racquetball. Thus, Lapine's storytelling skills added to Finn’s craftsmanship in songwriting created a “kaleidoscopic world of comedy and heartbreak with only seven performers.”  

*Falsettos* was Finn’s true romance in hard times.  

*Falsettos* was the title given to the double bill of *March of the Falsettos* and *Falsettoland*, resulting in a sung-through musical that tells Marvin’s story from his divorce from his wife to the loss of his lover to AIDS. After *Falsettoland* closed in January 1991, Playwright Horizons announced that they did not have the funds to produce the two one-act musicals as a double bill. Mark Lamos from Hartford (CT) Stage Company offered director Graciela Daniele the opportunity to direct the double bill in the fall of 1991. After *The New York Times* praised it, Lincoln Center contemplated producing it. However, the deal fell through, and Finn sought out producers Barry and Fran Weissler, who had been courting him with other offers.  

---


32 William Finn, interview by author, New York, NY, June 8, 2015.


34 For an account on why the Lincoln Center deal fell through, see Marty Bell, *Broadway Stories*, 28–29.
heard that Lincoln Center was no longer considering *Falsettos*, the Weisslers optioned to produce it on Broadway. They had seen *Falsettoland* at the Lucile Lortel and, having liked Finn’s musical, offered to stage the double bill with much of the original company. *Falsettos* opened on Broadway on April 29, 1992 and closed on June 27, 1993 after 487 performances. Finn and Lapine won the Tony Award for best original book of a musical, and Finn won a Tony Award for best original score.

The double bill did not bring many changes to either *March of the Falsettos* or *Falsettoland*. Both musicals maintained the same structure that they had had in their respective Off-Broadway productions, albeit Lapine made changes to their stagings. *March of the Falsettos*, now the first act of *Falsettos*, included a new song. Finn and Lapine added “I’m Breaking Down,” from the 1981 revival of *In Trousers*, to provide Trina with a solo scene where she could react to her husband leaving her for another man.35 *Falsettos* made musical theater history not only because of its subject matter, but also because it was an *American* sung-through musical that opened on Broadway at a time when sung-through British musicals had taken the Great White Way by storm. *Cats* (1982), *Les Misérables* (1987), *The Phantom of the Opera* (1988), and *Miss Saigon* (1991) were all still playing when Finn and Lapine brought Marvin and his family to Broadway. Indeed, critic Frank Rich argued that *Falsettos* was part of a theater season, that was “marked by signs of an American musical renaissance on Broadway.”36

Finn and Lapine’s next partnership, *A New Brain*, also organizes the dramatic action in a song cycle structure. Similar to the Marvin musicals, *A New Brain* originated out of songs, not

35 I discuss how the song “I’m Breaking Down” moved from *In Trousers* to *Falsettos* in chapter 5.

from a book with spoken dialogue. In mid-1992, some months after he had won two Tony Awards for *Falsettos*, Finn found out that he had something blocking the flow of fluid in his brain, causing it to accumulate in his skull. The first consultations revealed that he had an inoperable brain tumor. After some of the fluid was drained, he went through resonance tests, and half of his brain paralyzed. Although he did not have a tumor, Finn was diagnosed with an arteriovenous malformation (AVM), which occurs when blood from an artery flows direct into a vein, creating a mass of tissue that was blocking the fluid in his brain. Finn had to go through radiation to unblock the vein, but before this happened, the AVM hemorrhaged. Finn was kept in bed for several weeks, and steroids made him hallucinate. By the end of 1992 he had undergone radiation, which obliterated the AVM, the paralysis slowly weakened, and the songwriter started to recover.

This experience changed how Finn perceived the world and his own career. The years that followed were full of “unprecedented serenity . . . this was the time that I felt I had the new brain . . . a new way of thinking. Simplifying, not being cynical.” Finn had a burst of creativity during his recuperation process and wrote about his life-changing experience in the form of songs. He remembered: “When I came out of the hospital, I couldn’t sit at the piano without writing a decent song. At the piano, there was just all this gratitude that I was alive and all this life spewing out of me—the piano was singing—and I was just there to write it down. And so I had a bunch of these songs and I started putting them together, making a show.” Indeed, he composed the songs while contemplating a possible revue:

---


All the songs were written for the show, I worked on them for five years [1993–1998]. It was a very difficult time for me, and I was writing the story of my life. My first night out of the hospital, I knew how to write it [the song “I Feel So Much Spring”], what each verse was going to do. I had been diagnosed with a life-threatening disease. It was difficult! I like to express pain and joy at the same time in my songs, and first night out of the hospital, I finally knew how to write it.\footnote{William Finn, interview by author, New York, NY, June 8, 2015.}

Director Graciela Daniele, after listening to the songs, suggested that a revue would not be sufficient to depict a life experience of this magnitude.\footnote{Ellen Pall, “The Long-Running Musical of William Finn’s Life.”}

Finn initially wrote eight songs that formed the basis of \textit{A New Brain}. After some time working on the material, Daniele and Finn decided that they needed the help of Lapine to structure a plot that would connect the songs in a coherent dramaturgy. Lapine joined the creative team after the musical had had some workshop performances, and contrary to the usual practice in musical theater, helped Finn conceive a book out of songs, a book that arranged the dramatic action from song to song. Lapine also created the character of Mr. Bungee and made the medical information less literal and more comical. Just like they had done in the 1980s, Lapine would tell Finn what type of song was needed, especially those concerning Mr. Bungee. Lapine has stated his view on \textit{A New Brain}: “If you try to articulate what the show’s about, it’s so clichéd. Smell the flowers. But what makes it unique is that it is told through Bill’s voice.”\footnote{Quoted in ibid.}

\textit{A New Brain} opened Off-Broadway at the Mitzi E. Newhouse Theater at Lincoln Center on June 18, 1998, and closed on October 11, after a couple of extensions in the run and cast changes. Several of the critics commented on the work’s sung-through structure. Charles Isherwood wrote, “Despite being virtually sung-through—or indeed perhaps because of it—[the
musical] seems more a disconnected series of numbers strung together than a shapely told
tale.” Sam Whitehead wrote that the book for this musical “can be described only as thin to
nonexistent.” Daniele, the director, embraced the show precisely because of its unconventional
structure. She recalled: “The challenge mostly is not [the musical’s] theme. It’s the fact that the
piece is very impressionistic. It is not a conventional musical with a plot and a book and
numbers. It’s like a cycle of songs, with a very strong thematic line and a slight plot. But through
the songs one has to the story and the impressions of these characters.”

Galt MacDermot’s musical *The Human Comedy* also resembles a song cycle. Unlike
Finn’s musicals, however, MacDermot chose the sung-through format because he believed that
*The Human Comedy* was an opera and therefore had to be sung from beginning to end. The
inception of *The Human Comedy* dates back to when MacDermot had been commissioned for
such a work by an opera company in Western Canada. He debated for three years which topic
and story to set to music. He had first been introduced to William Saroyan’s 1943 novel *The
Human Comedy* during Christmas 1981, when his brother-in-law requested that each of the
children read an excerpt from a literary work, and MacDermot’s son was assigned to read an

---

42 Charles Isherwood, review of *A New Brain*, by William Finn and James Lapine, Mitzi E. Newhouse,

43 Sam Whitehead, review of *A New Brain*, by William Finn and James Lapine, Mitzi E. Newhouse, New

44 Quoted in Allan Wallach, “Second Chances: An Artist’s Musical Journey through Illness,” *Newsday*,


46 Galt MacDermot, interview by Kenneth Turan, March 26, 1987, Joseph Papp Oral History Interviews,
New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, New York, NY. *The New York Times* reported that the
commission was from a Canadian fine arts school (Leslie Bennetts, “Holiday Party Inspired ‘Human Comedy’
excerpt from Saroyan’s novel. MacDermot read the novel afterwards and settled on its story of a small-town California family during World War II for the topic of his opera.47

He invited writer William Dumaresq to write the book and lyrics for the project. MacDermot and Dumaresq had worked together on previous projects, including a 1970 musical in London titled Isabel’s a Jezebel and the 1975 Mass Take This Bread–A Mass in Our Time, and together they performed as the folk duo Angus and Fergus MacRoy.48 When MacDermot and Dumaresq met to discuss the project (Dumaresq lived in London, MacDermot in New York City), the Canadian commissioner expressed disapproval over funding an opera based on an American novel and requested that they change the locale from California to Canada. MacDermot did not accept the condition and canceled the commission. However, he was very much involved in the project and invited Dumaresq to finish it and look for potential producers.49

In spring 1983, after some unsuccessful auditions, MacDermot reached out to producer Joseph Papp, whose Off-Broadway theater, the Public Theater, had produced MacDermot’s two most successful musicals: Hair (1967) and The Two Gentlemen of Verona (1971). Papp had just enjoyed a successful run of a revival of Gilbert and Sullivan’s The Pirates of Penzance and agreed to hear MacDermot and Dumaresq’s opera. Papp enjoyed what he heard and hired Wilford Leach, who had directed Pirates of Penzance, to direct The Human Comedy. Papp liked that The Human Comedy was sung-through and blurred the lines between opera and musical theater. MacDermot believed that no other producer in New York at that time would have agreed to produce an all-sung show.50 Papp himself became involved with the production not only

47 Leslie Bennetts, “Holiday Party Inspired ‘Human Comedy’ Opera.”
because of its unconventional structure but also because it tapped into memories of his childhood and young adulthood. The producer went on to make several of the radio and television commercials for *The Human Comedy*, and his photograph could be seen in posters for the production throughout the city as well as on the program and even at the marquee at the Royale Theater when the production moved to Broadway. The *Human Comedy* opened at the Public Theater on December 28, 1983, where it ran for 79 performances, closing on March 4, 1984. Positive reviews prompted Papp to take it to Broadway in a partnership with the Shubert Organization. *The Human Comedy* opened at the Royale Theater on Broadway on April 5, 1984, where it ran for nineteen previews and only thirteen performances, closing on April 15. It was the fourteenth production that Papp had shipped uptown from the Public (among the previous ones were *Hair* and *A Chorus Line*).

MacDermot’s compositional process reveals why and how the composer decided on the sung-through format. Dumaresq penned the script first, based on Saroyan’s novel. He probably suspected that MacDermot would set it to music because every line of dialogues is metered, and all of the stanzas feature internal or end rhymes. MacDermot structured his music on Dumaresq’s script. The composer took it with him to Canada, where he musicalized the entire script in two months over a summer. Although the Canadian commission had fallen through and Papp’s theater focused solely on spoken drama and musicals, MacDermot set the entire script to music because he still wanted to write an opera. He did not segment his opera with arias, ariosos, or

---


53 Ibid. Although MacDermot has claimed *The Human Comedy* to be, in his words, “basically an opera,” many other terms have been used to describe the work: musical, folk opera, pop-folk opera, cantata, pop cantata, oratorio, and even opera-musical. My purpose is not to investigate and discuss which of these terms is applicable to the work. Instead, I will examine its structure and discuss how it is similar to that of other pieces of the American musical theater. It is not my aim to question MacDermot’s labeling of this work as an opera.
duets and trios, but with eighty-six songs. MacDermot composed interludes between some of the songs and decided which songs were set to tuneful music and which would be recitatives. The chorus narrates and comments on the action in the manner of a Greek chorus, and Dumaresq indicated which stanzas and songs were to be sung by the chorus. MacDermot took the liberty of using the chorus to accompany a soloist in several songs. He was given very good vocalists to work with at the Public, and he was not exactly sure which instruments he would have in the orchestra, so he tried to create variety with the voices. Dumaresq had established what was going to be a dialogue, monologue, or comment on the action. MacDermot subsequently composed music for each of these parts, creating songs that flow uninterruptedly from one to another in a score that sprawls to 1,687 measures in Act I and 1,853 in Act II.

MacDermot preferred to set text to music in his compositions for the theater. In all of his projects, he started composing only after the lyrics were more or less complete: “I like setting the words of another person’s life. It’s like painting a picture. You wouldn’t paint a picture of yourself over and over.” For Hair, he claimed that it “was easy to do” and “the songs came easily because the lyrics were so natural.” For Two Gentlemen of Verona, Raul Julia, who played the protagonist in the original production, has explained the musical’s conception:

We started reading the play [Shakespeare’s original], and Galt would write the music as we went along, and [lyricist and book writer] John Guare would write the script as we went along, eliminating some Shakespeare and putting in some of our own stuff. [Director and book writer] Mel Shapiro was very open and let the actors improvise a lot and do their own thing, and whatever we did, they would put down. John would come in the next day with some new lines and Galt would come in with a new song, and we kept doing that until we opened.57

54 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
57 Kenneth Turan and Joseph Papp, Free for All: Joe Papp, the Public, and the Greatest Theater Story Ever Told (New York: Doubleday, 2009), 248.
John Guare commented on the process: “I would call Galt up and leave lyrics on his service, mail them to him, or drop them off. Songs were written, thrown away, and put back.”\(^{58}\) The composer’s preference for setting text to music corroborates his ease in musicalizing an entire script, as he did for *The Human Comedy*.

MacDermot’s choice of the sung-through format provides additional suspension of disbelief as it requires the audience to relate to Saroyan’s story. MacDermot explained:

> In most plays, people talk like they talk, but in this one they don’t say normal things. When the thief comes in and the guy [Spangler] tells him to take the money, the guy is almost happy about it. The things people say to each other in *The Human Comedy* are totally unlike things people say; they’re in another realm. I think that’s good for a musical, because music isn’t a real thing, people don’t really sing to each other. So when you’re singing, other rules of behavior and common-sense reality are suspended. I found that Saroyan had suspended it already in the novel.\(^{59}\)

Indeed, in his review of the Off-Broadway production, Frank Rich observed that Saroyan’s book had introduced a suspension of reality by creating a fictional town “where even the poor give to charity, where thieves are disarmed by kindness, and where ethic and racial differences are a cause for celebration.”\(^{60}\) To enhance the suspension of disbelief, the original production relied on Brechtian theater and had very little scenery (chairs and a few props), minimal period costumes, and both the cast and orchestra were present on stage the entire time watching the action when not taking part in it. MacDermot’s eighty-six songs out of Dumaresq’s script that never resort to spoken dialogue also challenged the suspension of disbelief with the work’s unconventional structure.

---

\(^{58}\) Ibid., 246.

\(^{59}\) Leslie Benettts, “Holiday Party Inspired ‘Human Comedy’ Opera.”

Jason Robert Brown’s process in creating his musical *The Last Five Years* reveals that the sung-through structure can be traced to the musical’s inception. The idea of a new musical came to him in 1999, after his musical *Parade* had completed its run at Lincoln Center. Thomas Cott, then artistic director of Lincoln Center, commissioned Brown for a new musical. As he recalled: “I was determined that my next piece would be different from *Parade* in two important respects: first, I wanted it to be small in scale—two actors, so that it could be performed in any size theater, or even a concert hall or cabaret; and second, I wanted the songs to feel like, well, songs—one person having a complete musical moment, like a track on an album, without needing dialogue to tell the story.”\(^{61}\)

Brown had been frustrated that it had taken him five years to write *Parade*, yet it had played for just three months. He contemplated leaving the theater business to teach. Billy Rosenfield, senior vice president for shows and soundtracks at RCA Victor, advised him to compose a song cycle before giving up a career in musical theater. In Brown’s own words: “I started thinking: ‘I’ll just write a song cycle’ . . . it was going to be for two people. And I thought: ‘Well, this is the anti-*Parade*’ . . . maybe it’ll be a theater song cycle.”\(^{62}\) However, as he developed the project, “the song cycle impetus receded, and it gradually became a piece of theater.”\(^{63}\) Brown thought it would be the right choice to make a man and a woman sing about their relationship and how it ended after five years. The problem with this idea was that both

---


characters would be moving towards the same dramatic climax, namely a breakup, and the musical would have had a tragic ending.\textsuperscript{64}

As he crossed 69\textsuperscript{th} street to meet with Cott at Lincoln Center, he had the idea that the woman’s songs should start at the end of the relationship and the man’s at the beginning.\textsuperscript{65} This would fulfill his first intentions for the project and avoid the characters singing too many duets. Brown also realized that their timelines would eventually cross, and at that moment, they would sing about their wedding day, the only part of the show “when they would both be in the same moment onstage at the same time.”\textsuperscript{66} Brown has also claimed, “the idea came before I understood it, which I think is kind of cool and mystic.”\textsuperscript{67} He knew that this musical was about two people who could not be at the same place and time. He structured the musical as a song cycle, alternating between hers and his, metaphorically reflecting what happens in the couple’s relationship: together, but each one going in a different direction.

Brown began composing the songs in June of 1999. The first music he composed for the musical was the opening waltz that now occupies the first twenty measures of the score and recurs at key moments of the plot.\textsuperscript{68} The first song that he composed was the ending of the musical, “Goodbye Until Tomorrow/I Could Never Rescue You,” on June 15, 1999, which features Cathy on their first date and Jamie saying goodbye on the day he is leaving her.\textsuperscript{69} In fact,


\textsuperscript{65} Brown, \textit{The Last Five Years}, vi.

\textsuperscript{66} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{69} Brown, \textit{The Last Five Years}, vi.
the man’s part of the song, “I Could Never Rescue You,” uses the musical’s opening waltz as its main theme. Brown composed the last song in 2001 for the Chicago opening, which took place at the Northlight Theatre on May 23, 2001. The Last Five Years opened Off-Broadway at the Minetta Lane Theatre on March 3, 2002 and closed on May 5.\textsuperscript{70} According to Brown, he rewrote some parts of the musical after and during the Chicago run, but the show did not change much when it opened in New York.\textsuperscript{71}

My research on the inception of these seven musicals reveals that creating a musical that communicates in song alone comes from their early genesis. None of the Finn’s musicals (the four Marvin musicals and A New Brain) nor Brown’s The Last Five Years started out as a book (or a script) that was filled with songs to expand dramatic moments or characterization. Instead, these musicals started out as a group of songs that were expanded with additional songs to form the musicals’ plot. The Human Comedy began as a complete script without music, but MacDermot’s decision to musicalize it all by breaking it into eighty-six continuous songs gave the work what it shares with Finn’s and Brown’s: a coherent sequence of songs that tells a story and articulates that story’s themes, characters, and situations.

**Song Sequence in the Song-Cycle Structure**

In sung-through musicals with a song-cycle structure, the sequence of songs forms and develops the plot in two ways. First, the action moves from song to song without dividing it into

\footnote{\textsuperscript{70} The partnership with Lincoln Center fell through after Brown’s ex-wife, Theresa O’Neill, maintaining that the musical was based on her own short-lived marriage with him, threatened to sue the production. She claimed that the musical violated the terms of her and Brown’s divorce agreement. After Lincoln Center announced the cancellation of the production and Brown negotiated another agreement with his ex-wife in court, some producers took the musical to the Minetta Lane Theater (Michael Riedel, “Lawsuit KOs New Musical,” The New York Post, October 26, 2001).}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{71} Jason Robert Brown, interview by Patrick Pacheco, February 11, 2013.}
scenes. This happens in all five Finn musicals and MacDermot’s *The Human Comedy*. Neither
the published books of these musicals nor the playbills for their original productions divide the
action into scenes. Instead, they are divided by “musical numbers.” Finn’s *In Trousers, March of
the Falsettos, Falsettoland*, and *A New Brain* are each performed in one act, and analyses of their
song sequence demonstrate that song groupings break the action into phases, demarcating
character and plot development. Second, Brown’s *The Last Five Years* positions each song as an
entire scene. An analysis of Brown’s song sequence reveals how he juxtaposed two different
versions of the same story in two plots that proceed in opposite directions chronologically.

The original production of *In Trousers* featured eighteen numbers that alternated between
Marvin’s present and past, as if the protagonist were in psychoanalysis struggling to understand
his sexuality. Finn posits his protagonist’s conflict early in the musical and develops it through
Marvin’s marriage, memories from high-school, and first encounter with Whizzer. Thus, the
sequence of songs breaks the action into six phases (see Table 1.1).

Table 1.1. The eighteen songs from *In Trousers* in six phases.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phases</th>
<th>Songs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| I.      | 1. Marvin’s Giddy Seizures  
         | 2. How the Body Falls Apart / Your Lips and Me |
| II.     | 3. How Marvin Eats His Breakfast  
         | 4. My High School Sweetheart  
         | 5. Set Those Sails            |
| Transition | 6. My Chance to Survive the Night |
| III.    | 7. I Am Wearing a Hat                    |
| IV.     | 8. Breakfast over Sugar  
         | 9. Whizzer Going Down                  |
| V.      | 10. High School Ladies at 5 O’Clock  
         | 11. The Rape of Miss Goldberg         |
| Back to IV. | 12. The Nausea before the Game  
         | 13. Love Me for What I Am             |
The first phase in the musical introduces the protagonist Marvin. The songs relate that he is married to a woman, but has been having thoughts and dreams about men. It also shows the wife attempting to live a normal married life, even though Marvin has been acting differently. The second phase enacts the first regression to Marvin’s adolescence and high school years, which explains his spoiled behavior and confusion regarding his sexuality. The third phase marks another regression, but to Marvin and his wife’s wedding day. The fourth phase returns the dramatic action to the present and shows Marvin’s enthusiasm for having met Whizzer, and his wife’s realization that he has changed. The fifth part interrupts the fourth bringing another regression to Marvin’s adolescence. The action returns to that of the fourth phase after this regression to reveal how they have grown apart. The sixth and final part concludes the plot and shows Marvin’s wife after the divorce and Marvin’s relief in finally accepting his sexuality.

Songs acquire important functions in each phase to form a plot. The first phase introduces Marvin’s wife in the second song, “Your Lips and Me.” The second phase introduces Marvin’s high school sweetheart and Miss Goldberg in the fourth and fifth songs, respectively. The song “My Chance to Survive the Night” functions as a transition from the first to the second regression. It is Marvin’s first soliloquy in the musical and his “I want” song in which he struggles to sleep while contemplating the possibility of not sleeping with women anymore. In the fourth and fifth phases, Finn explores Marvin’s relationship with his wife, his memories from his first night with Whizzer, how spoiled he was as a teenager, and fantasies he had concerning Miss Goldberg. Marvin confesses to have lost interest in his wife in song 12, and his confused mind has affected his wife, who sings “Love Me for What I Am,” recalling the time when she
met Marvin. In the sixth phase, Marvin remembers how as a teenager he liked to interpret Christopher Columbus’s decision to name the new world America. He liked to think that Columbus had an affair with Amerigo Vespucci and named the land to honor his lover. As Marvin discovers that the idea of men sleeping together had always been in his mind, he decides to leave his wife and accept his sexual orientation. Although this, too, torments him, he takes a victory shower, relieved by his new understanding, and finally falls asleep and dreams that women are no longer part of his sex life, just those in trousers. Thus, Finn created what he described as “a musical portrait of a young man’s journey into adulthood.”

March of the Falsettos continues Marvin’s story and explores his relationship with his son, ex-wife, and new male lover in twenty songs. The sequence of the songs divides the action into five phases (see Table 1.2).

Table 1.2. The twenty songs from March of the Falsettos in five phases.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phases</th>
<th>Songs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| I      | 1. Four Jews in a Room Bitching  
          2. A Tight-Knit Family |
| II     | 3. Love Is Blind  
          4. The Thrill of First Love  
          5. Marvin at the Psychiatrist  
          6. Everyone Tells Jason to See a Psychiatrist  
          7. This Had Better Come to a Stop |

72 The number “How America Got Its Name” features a play-within-a-musical that is spoken. The High School Sweetheart narrates Columbus’s saga and supposed affair with Vespucci, Miss Goldberg plays Queen Isabella, and Marvin plays Columbus. The presence of spoken lines does not disrupt the overall structure of the musical discussed here since they occur within a number bookended by music. The number starts with Miss Goldberg singing a reprise of “High School Ladies at 5 O’Clock” and ends with a reprise of “Set Those Sails.” When I asked Finn why he chose not to musicalize this part of “How America Got Its Name,” he replied that he thought it would be a necessary break for the audience from all the singing. William Finn, telephone interview with author, October 22, 2015.

73 Quoted in Marilyn Stasio, “‘In Trousers’ Is a Charmer,” The New York Post, March 16, 1979. The 1981 and 1985 versions of In Trousers maintained the same structure: songs in succession without forming scenes, but breaking into phases (see Tables 6.2 and 6.3 in chapter 6). Finn wrote additional songs for each of these phases, replaced others, and discarded some of the originals. I discuss Finn’s changes and rewriting in chapter 6.
Phase I introduces the characters and the protagonist’s main conflict. He wants his ex-wife and son to get along with his boyfriend. The second song establishes the pursuit of a tight-knit family as Marvin’s main aim in the musical. Phase II dramatizes Marvin’s complicated relationships: Trina has a difficult time accepting and accommodating herself to the change, Jason feels estranged from his father, and Whizzer struggles with Marvin’s bossiness and patriarchal values. This second phase also shows Marvin’s perspective on these matters and how he has struggled not to lose these relationships. This phase ends with all characters asking Marvin to realize that he is the cause of all their tribulations and the only one who can put a stop to them. Phase III initially moves away from Marvin and focuses on Trina, Jason, and Mendel (Marvin’s psychiatrist). Mendel succeeds in helping Jason and asking Trina to marry him. This phase ends with Marvin still longing for a tight-knit family, while Mendel sings the same song to affirm that he has created his own family with Trina and Jason.

Phase IV comments on the action, and Finn and Lapine used the second song that Finn wrote for the show, “March of the Falsettos,” to explore falsetto as a metaphor for masculinity. First, Trina notices some similarities between Mendel and Marvin and is “tired of all the happy
men who rule the world.” 74 The four men enter to protest that it is not simple to be a man as Trina implies in her song. The march that men go into life from childhood to adulthood takes courage and requires that they rethink masculinity. The happy men who rule the world have to face this march toward maturity, but only a few are brave enough to join it. Trina reprises her song, apologizes, and accepts that this march of the falsettos has an impact on her life. She sings: “I’m too prepared, I’m duly warned, and duly scared. My life is now on trial. I smile.” 75 The fifth phase dramatizes the incompatibilities in Marvin and Whizzer’s relationship and Marvin’s unhappiness with Trina’s marriage to Mendel, causing his relationship with them to fall apart. Whizzer’s leaving Marvin contrasts with Trina and Mendel, who have been successful in “Making a Home” together. After Marvin hits Trina, the adults agree that they are through with one another. Marvin realizes that he may not have gotten his tight-knit family, but he is not through with Jason. The musical ends with Marvin apologizing to his son for causing troubles to their family and explaining that Jason, too, will have to find his voice as he marches on the road to adulthood.

Falsettoland concludes the story of Marvin and his family with seventeen songs in six phases. Although this musical has the least number of songs of the Marvin musicals, the sequence of songs divides the action into more phases than the other two (see Table 1.3). Lapine’s skills at structuring Finn’s songs into a plot succeeded in creating a musical that “encompasses the full range of dramatic expression from farce to tragedy.” 76


75 Ibid., 155.

Table 1.1. The seventeen songs from *Falsettoland* in six phases.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phases</th>
<th>Songs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>1. Welcome to Falsettoland</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| II     | 2. The Year of the Child  
|        | 3. Miracle of Judaism     
|        | 4. The Baseball Game      |
| III    | 5. A Day in Falsettoland  |
| IV     | 6. The Fight              
|        | 7. Everyone Hates His Parents |
| V      | 8. What More Can I Say?   
|        | 9. Something Bad Is Happening |
|        | 10. Holding to the Ground |
|        | 11. Days Like This I Almost Believe in God |
|        | 12. Canceling the Bar Mitzvah |
|        | 13. Unlikely Lovers       |
|        | 14. Another Miracle of Judaism |
| VI     | 15. You Gotta Die Sometime |
|        | 16. Jason’s Bar Mitzvah   |
|        | 17. What Would I Do?      |

The first phase contains just the opening number, which reminds the audience who the characters are, introduces two new ones, Charlotte and Cordelia, and allows Marvin a solo in which he admits, “It’s about time to grow up and face the music.” The second phase focuses on the preparations for Jason’s bar mitzvah, and Marvin and Whizzer’s reencounter after their breakup (which occurred at the end of *March of the Falsettos*). The third phase also features just one song about a day in the life of these characters. While Mendel and Trina are annoyed by current events, they believe that “everything will be alright.” The song also presents Charlotte and Cordelia’s relationship as a happy one while Marvin and Whizzer continue to compete with one another. Their differences at playing racquetball serves as a metaphor for the ones they have as a couple.

---

Phase four returns the focus to Jason’s bar mitzvah, but now Mendel steps in to help the boy cope with the differences between his parents, which make him not want a bar mitzvah at all. Phase five introduces the drama’s other main topic: Whizzer’s HIV status. Phase five begins with Marvin’s first love ballad in the trilogy, followed by Whizzer’s HIV status, and the other characters reacting to his situation. The final phase of the musical combines the two main topics of the musical, Jason’s bar mitzvah and Whizzer’s medical condition. Whizzer admits that he cannot fight and be strong forever, and Jason decides to have his bar mitzvah in Whizzer’s hospital room. The penultimate song shows that Marvin has finally found his tight-knit family. Mendel sings that Jason is “son of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Son of Marvin, son of Trina, son of Whizzer, son of Mendel,” to which all add “And godchild to the lesbians from next door.” Whizzer cannot remain in the room during the bar mitzvah and leaves. When Marvin and Whizzer sing in the last song, the audience learns that Whizzer has died.

The song sequencing of *Falsettos* does not break the action sequence into scenes. The double bill simply combined *March of the Falsettos* and *Falsettoland* into a longer sequence of songs that encompasses Marvin’s divorce and losing his boyfriend to AIDS. The phases of each musical continue to apply in the double bill; however, this longer sequence of song breaks the action into two acts. Finn and Lapine conceived the ending of *March of the Falsettos* as an Act I finale. The song “I Never Wanted to Love You” leaves Marvin’s relationships with Whizzer and Trina in need of resolution. They agree that they have a situation that cannot remain so complicated forever. The song “Father to Son” furthers the metaphor of the musical’s title as Marvin explains to Jason that he, too, will have to sing to himself as he marches toward adulthood, and it brings a resolution to the protagonist’s relationship with his son. By the same

---

78 Ibid., 244.
token, “Welcome to Falsettoland” functions as a second act opener. Finn wrote this song with the intent of making it an opening number that would follow *March of the Falsettos*. This song develops what we already know about the characters and allows Marvin to finally admit that his spoiled behavior had better end, as the other characters had demanded in song 7 from *March of the Falsettos*.

Finn’s musical *A New Brain* features thirty-two songs. The playbill of the original production did not list them, and the published book of the musical presents them with stage directions in between but without divisions into scenes. The action can be divided into three phases: Gordon’s collapse, his treatment at the hospital, and his recovery process (see Table 1.4).

**Table 1.4.** The thirty-two songs from *A New Brain* in three phases.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phases</th>
<th>Songs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>1. Prologue:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frogs Have So Much Spring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Calamari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>911 Emergency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Heart and Music</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

The first phase introduces the songwriter protagonist, Gordon. In the prologue he struggles to write a new song about frogs in springtime for his boss, Mr. Bungee, and goes to have lunch with his friend Rhoda. He then falls with his face in his dish after singing “something is very wrong.” The treatment phase features the greatest number of songs of the three phases. As the action sequence develops continuously from one song to another, these twenty-six songs depict three different fictional layers. The first layer represents the present time in the diegesis of the musical: Gordon’s hospital room, his interaction with the nurses and doctor, and his
relationship with his boyfriend (Roger), best friend (Rhoda), and mother. The second layer features songs that depict the world outside the hospital, of which Gordon is not aware. These songs (marked with * in Table 1.4) focus mainly on the homeless lady and her demands for change. A third fictional layer comprises songs that depict what goes on inside Gordon’s mind as he undergoes treatment (marked with # in Table 1.4). Some of these songs are flashbacks, which communicate information about Gordon’s life and family; others are hallucinations, which result from the steroids administered during the surgery. Finn and Lapine alternate these three fictional layers and make the action sequence move from one to the other, creating a plot structured entirely in song.

Three of these songs transition from one fictional layer to another. “Be Polite to Everyone” transitions between the hospital (as Gordon’s mother talks to him) and Gordon’s mind, as he imagines Mr. Bungee telling him to be nice to his mother. The song “Yes” begins in the hospital with Gordon composing a new song for Mr. Bungee. It is the night before the surgery, and Gordon wants to compose a song to leave behind in case he does not survive his surgery. By the end of the song, the action moves to Mr. Bungee reading and singing Gordon’s song. He likes it initially, but the lyrics in the second part irritate him, and Mr. Bungee decides to pass the responsibility of composing a new song to his son. The song “Don’t Give In” starts inside Gordon’s mind as he hallucinates that Mr. Bungee, using the same tone he uses to address the children in his TV show, advises him to be strong and to survive the coma. The song moves to the real world, as Roger, Rhoda, and Gordon’s mother gather around the hospital bed repeating the title of the song until Gordon wakes up from the coma.

The third phase presents a changed Gordon taking his time to enjoy life. The homeless lady becomes his last conflict in the story. She acquired his personal books after Gordon’s
mother threw them away when she was cleaning his apartment during the song “Throw It Out.”
The homeless lady is finally making some changes in her life by selling the books, and when Gordon sees her and recognizes his personal library, he demands his books back. She insists that he would have to pay and, as he refuses, she goes away with all of his books. Gordon realizes that he is different after the treatment and will use this moment to start anew. He sings, “So on this new day, let’s begin from scratch.” Gordon’s realization segues to a reprise of “Heart and Music,” albeit Finn replaced the word “heart with “time.” This brings the entire company to the stage, and they all sing together, “time and music make a song.” Gordon follows by singing his new composition, “I Feel So Much Spring,” which uses and expands the same music that he wrote for “Frogs Have So Much Spring” in the prologue.

*The Human Comedy* consists of a script set to music. Dumaresq created the dramatic action before MacDermot started composing. As he musicalized the script, he divided it into eighty-six songs. As it survives in the rental materials for this musical and the Joseph Papp papers at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, MacDermot did not begin each song on a new page or even title them. The songs titles appear throughout the score, marked after double bars, indicating that the score has moved to a new song. MacDermot considered the continuity of the songs as fundamental to the action, and not unlike his score for *Hair*, the score to *The Human Comedy* infers plot and character development.

The locales in the action of *The Human Comedy* move between different places. As the eighty-six songs flow from one to another, scenes occur at the Macaulay household, Homer’s school, Mr. Spangler’s telegraph office, and the war front. In order to accommodate

---


81 Ibid., 73–74.
MacDermot’s songs, the playbill for the original production divided the action sequence not into scenes, but with headings based on the locales where an action or event took place. These headings suggest that the production team may have been concerned about how audiences would comprehend the musical continuity that characterizes *The Human Comedy*. They broke the action sequence into eighteen phases that function essentially like scenes. Not all of the eighty-six songs appear under these headings. Instead, the playbill lists forty-five of them: twenty-four in the first act and twenty-one in the second. Short songs, especially recitatives like “Mama,” “What Do I Sing?,” and “Come On, Toby,” and those in which the chorus narrates and comments on the action, like “Mary Arena,” “As the Poet Said,” and “Slowly the Reality” were not listed in the playbill. Thus, the songs that appear in the playbill become units of the dramatic action that communicate to the audience that the action progresses in eighteen phases, which in turn inform changes in the configuration of characters and scenery. This same division of the action into eighteen locales appears in the first pages of the published book of the musical, although the main body of this script develops, like the score, continually (neither the locales nor the songs’ titles are included in it).

The song sequence in *The Last Five Years* creates two action sequences that move in opposite directions. As Jamie sings about the couple’s relationship in chronological order and Cathy sings about it in reverse, the fourteen songs of the musical form the same number of scenes with specific locales, times, and character configurations (see Table 1.5). The chronological progression of their relationship from the first to the fifth year can be traced if his column is read downward from 2 to 14 and hers upwards from 14 to 1.

---

Table 1.5. The fourteen songs from *The Last Five Years* in fourteen scenes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cathy’s Songs</th>
<th>Jamie’s Songs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Year Five)</td>
<td>(Year One)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Still Hurting</td>
<td>2. Shiksa Goddess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. See I’m Smiling</td>
<td>4. Moving Too Fast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. A Part of That</td>
<td>6. The Schmuel Song</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. A Summer in Ohio</td>
<td>8. The Next Ten Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. A Miracle Would Happen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Climbing Uphill</td>
<td>11. If I Didn’t Believe in You</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Year One)</td>
<td>(Year Five)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.5 reveals that both characters sing the same number of songs, and only twice do they sing together (songs 8 and 14), and only once do they sing the same song, “The Next Ten Minutes.”

The order of the songs in *The Last Five Years* reveals how Brown created dramatic action. The characters’ moods change in opposite direction as the musical progresses. Cathy begins with sad songs in slow tempos and Jamie with upbeat, fast songs. The saddest song that each one sings occurs in the fifth year of the relationship and opposite ends of the musical: song number 1 for Cathy (her pain after Jamie breaks up with her) and song number 13 for Jamie (his confession that he can no longer continue the relationship). Conversely, two of the happiest songs occur in the middle of the musical—also the middle of the relationship—when both characters sing an upbeat, fast song (songs 6 and 7). Brown wanted the relationship to start falling apart after the wedding (song 8). Cathy sings about hopes to maintain the relationship and
frustration caused by Jamie’s behavior in her first three songs. Jamie sings about his difficulty in living in a monogamous relationship and dealing with her profitless career as an actress in his four last songs.

In addition, correspondences between songs occur at opposite ends of the musical. Song 3 marks Cathy’s reply to Jamie’s song 11. In both songs, the singing character attempts to maintain the relationship despite differences. Cathy points out that they are still smiling together, laughing at each other jokes; she is happy that he went to meet her in Ohio (where she is working for the summer), and she gets angry at him when referring to his tendency to spend more time with his friends than with her. These remarks suggest that they have had fights before, and song 11 depicts Jamie’s arguments during a fight on why he behaves the way he does and how he supports her, even if she fails to see it. Song 1 may be interpreted as a reply to Jamie’s song 14. They both occur at the end of the relationship, and Jamie and Cathy use similar language to express their feelings. In “I Could Never Rescue You,” Jamie writes the note that Cathy found at the beginning of the musical. He sings as he writes,

JAMIE
I’m not the only one who’s hurting here
I don’t know what the hell is left to do.
You never saw how far the crack had opened.
You never knew I had run out of rope and
I could never rescue you.\(^\text{83}\)

In the first song of the musical, Cathy cries after reading the note and sings,

CATHY
Maybe there’s somewhere a lesson to learn,
But that wouldn’t change the fact,
That wouldn’t speed the time
Once the foundation’s cracked,
And I’m still hurting.\(^\text{84}\)

\(^{83}\) Brown, The Last Five Years, 62.

\(^{84}\) Ibid., 7.
Thus, the opening song makes it clear that the end of the relationship was tough for Cathy even before the audience learns what led to the breakup.

Brown included one song in the middle of two other songs, enhancing his characterization of Cathy. The song “When You Come Home to Me” (not listed Table 1.5) is the one that she sings at auditions. It does not occur as an individual scene, but diegetically in the middle of songs 9 and 10. Brown marked it to be played and sung as a “medium ballad à la Jerome Kern” to suggest the break from non-diegetic to diegetic singing. Song 9 depicts Jamie some time after the wedding struggling with monogamy. Meanwhile, Cathy auditions for the job in Ohio and sings the song “simply and perfectly.” Song 10 moves the action to some time before the wedding and depicts Cathy struggling with her acting career. She opens song 10 repeating the chorus of “When You Come Home to Me,” but Brown writes it to be sung “dancy and perky,” indicating an early approach Cathy had toward her audition song. When she auditions again in the middle of song 10, she starts thinking about her life choices and uses the same music that is being played diegetically to reveal what she is thinking as she sings. Brown changes the tune from tuneful and “à la Kern” to a fast patter in order to accommodate her thoughts. Song 10 concludes with Cathy singing the tune once more, but now she attempts to “compensate for her previous mousiness with a hysterical stridency, which essentially forces her to scream every note at the loudest possible volume.” The inclusion of “When You Come Home to Me” as a song within a song helps detail Cathy’s development as a struggling actress,

---

85 Ibid., 39.
86 Ibid., 47–48.
albeit in reverse chronological order: grappling with the song and audition process in song 10, a successful audition in song 9, and a job in Ohio in song 7.

In his seminal book on a theory of drama, *A Structural Approach to the Analysis of Drama*, Paul M. Levitt discusses how the structure of a dramatic text relates to its organization. He writes: “We must first decide what it is that comprises that organization; specifically, what parts comprise that organization. In drama studies, the term [that] causes disagreement is ‘parts.’ The question for us then is, what do we mean by parts? If we can determine this, and the function of those parts, we can . . . arrive at an understanding of what structure means and what it can teach us.”\(^{87}\) Levitt subsequently lists and discusses what other scholars have argued to be “the basic parts or units of play construction.”\(^{88}\) He demonstrates that no consensus has been reached. Some have argued that acts form the unit of a dramatic text, while others have considered scenes, and still others, episodes.\(^{89}\) This chapter has demonstrated that in a sung-through musical, songs form the basic unit. They are smaller units than scenes, acts, or episodes, and these “parts” depend on how much dramatic content each of the songs carries and the number and juxtaposition of singing characters in each. A sequence of song provides dramatic cohesion in the seven musicals considered here.

This chapter has shown that the positioning of songs creates and develops the dramatic action, and marks an important method to understanding both the dramatic and the musical architecture of the sung-through musical. Communicating in song marks a unique dramatic


\(^{88}\) Ibid.

\(^{89}\) Ibid., 14–19. Levitt concludes that scenes form the basic unit in dramatic structure.
technique that distinguishes these musicals from all other forms of theater. The discussion of these musicals’ structure exposes how the American sung-through musical challenges its closest relative: the traditional book musical. As Mark Steyn has written: “through-sung music theater is equivalent to motoring down a deserted interstate in an automatic set on cruise control. The book musical, to switch transportation metaphors, deploys horses for courses.”

---

90 Mark Steyn, *Broadway Babies Say Goodnight: Musicals Then and Now* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1997), 96.
Chapter 2

Song-Through Musicals that Employ an Embedded-Song Structure

Similar to the musicals discussed in the previous chapter, the sung-through musicals with an embedded-song structure also have songs as the main unit of the dramatic action. Their position in a scene establishes other segments like entrance and exit of characters, and division of scenes and acts. Different from the song cycle structure, the songs are not the only musical means in a scene. Songs take a center position, but the composer circumscribes them with other musico-dramatic devices. On one hand, these devices acquire the same function that spoken dialogue has in the book musical and develop a scene in at least one of three ways: structuring a scene from its beginning to a song, connecting songs within a scene, or closing a scene after a song. On the other hand, these devices make the sung-through musical contrast with the book musical by weaving the music into the script in a way that, as critic Ben Brantley has put it, “you’ll find yourself hard pressed to recall what exactly was said and what was sung.”

The embedded-song structure’s reliance on underscoring and snippets of spoken dialogue problematizes the notion of a sung-through musical, leaving performers, directors, critics, and historians to characterize musicals in this structure as nearly or virtually sung through. I argue in this chapter that it is precisely this aspect of the embedded-song structure that challenges the book musical. These nearly sung-through musicals do not go as far as musicalizing every word, like those in a song cycle structure, but they narrow the limits between singing and speaking in a way that the traditional book musical never achieved. If this creates a special breed of the musical between the entirely sung-through and the traditional book musical, then what are the

---

means through which composers employ those musico-dramatic devices to embed songs? How do composers decide what is to be sung and what is to be spoken? What functions do short spoken passages acquire? Why did the creators of a nearly sung-through musical shape their plots and songs in this structure? In this chapter I explore these questions by demonstrating that Jeffrey Lunden, Michael John La Chiusa, Jonathan Larson, Andrew Lippa, and Jeanine Tesori communicate and develop the dramatic action in their respective musicals by embedding songs with other musico-dramatic devices.

My analyses of Wings, Hello Again, Rent, The Wild Party, and Caroline, or Change have revealed five techniques through which composers embed and connect songs. These techniques are the interrupted song, when a song is prolonged in a scene interrupted by other musico-dramatic devices and does not reach an ending until the end of the scene; short song excerpts (some in contrafacta) that recur in different scenes, either in the middle of another song or between two full-fledged songs; leitmotifs between songs; underscoring of spoken passages or those that mix spoken and sung dialogue; and short spoken passages without music. I discuss each of these techniques individually below referring to specific musical examples.\(^2\) These techniques are not mutually exclusive. In fact, my discussion shows that two or more of these techniques may operate in tandem to link songs in a scene. Also, the first four techniques occur in book musicals, increasing the presence of music and adding to its function. In the sung-through structure, which lacks spoken dialogue to generate the reasons for singing, these techniques are used more frequently to connect songs and develop the dramatic action.

---

\(^2\) I provide examples for each technique based on the chronological order of the five musicals: Wings (March 1993), Hello Again (1994), Rent (1996), The Wild Party (2000), and Caroline, or Change (2003). For plot summaries of these musicals, see Appendix A.
**Interrupted Song**

In an interrupted song, the composer prolongs a song throughout a scene or an act, preventing it from reaching an ending by interrupting it with other songs, underscoring, or short spoken passages without music. All of the five musicals present at least one example of an interrupted song.

The song “All in All” in Lunden’s *Wings* presents the dramatic action from Emily’s perspective, as she balances how for better or worse her situation (a stroke victim in a hospital) could be. It is interrupted when the music therapist, Amy, introduces Emily to her first music therapy session, in which Amy plays “Let Me Call You Sweetheart.”³ The dramatic action follows to the doctor, the nurse, and Amy trying to awaken Emily in the number “Makey Your Naming Powers.”⁴ “All in All” returns eight songs later, after “Tither,” a song that enacts a session with the doctor and the extent of Emily’s aphasia. The doctor interrupts this song a second time, cueing the beginning of “I Don’t Trust Him.” “All in All” finds closure in another song, “Like the Clouds,” which occurs later in the musical, when Emily is at the rehabilitation center. This song shows Emily balancing the situation once again, but now between recovering and possibly dying. “Like the Clouds” is in AABA form, and the A sections use the same theme from “All in All” in the accompaniment, and both songs function as internal monologues in which Emily is able to express herself despite her aphasia.

LaChiusa’s *Hello Again* features one example of an interrupted song: the title song in Scene 1. The song’s form structures the scene as it depicts the Whore seducing the Soldier. The

³ “Let Me Call You Sweetheart” is a 1910 Tin Pan Alley song with music by Leo Friedman and lyrics by Beth Slater Whitson. The audience hears it from Emily’s perspective; therefore, it sounds very slow and purposefully unrecognizable.

⁴ Some of the songs in the first part of *Wings* show how the doctor and nurse hear Emily’s struggle withaphasia; therefore, the lyrics and song titles make little or no semantic sense, such as “Globbidge,” “Makey Your Naming Powers,” “Tither,” and “Malacats.”
The song is in AABA form followed by a dance break and a final iteration of the main strain. The Whore sings the main strains, and the Soldier interrupts by adding spoken interjections and recitatives between the parts, initially rejecting her, but slowly unable to resist her (see Table 2.1).

Table 2.1. Form and structure of the song “Hello Again.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Key</th>
<th>Measure numbers</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>F-sharp major</td>
<td>mm. 1–38</td>
<td>Soldier interjects spoken lines mm. 15–16 and m. 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2</td>
<td>B-flat major</td>
<td>mm. 46–74</td>
<td>Soldier interjects spoken lines mm. 52–53 and a sung line in mm. 60–61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3</td>
<td>F-sharp major</td>
<td>mm. 111–48</td>
<td>Soldier sings a line in mm. 117–18 and speaks one in mm. 124–25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dance break</td>
<td></td>
<td>mm. 149–200</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A4</td>
<td>F-sharp major</td>
<td>mm. 201–54</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Soldier’s recitatives feature a narrow vocal range and repetitive pitches that contrast with the Whore’s tuneful seduction waltz. LaChiusa builds the Soldier’s sung passages by fragmenting and foreshadowing the main theme of “I Got a Little Time,” the song with which the Soldier seduces the Nurse in the following scene. In addition, A3 adds a turn in the main melody compared to the other two A sections, making it reach the song’s highest note when the whore sings “we may die tomorrow.” It reoccurs in A4 after the characters have sex in the dance break, but the same music now sets the words “how about a dime, love?” What once was the climax of her seduction now places the Whore in a pathetic situation. A4 has the song’s main theme underscoring a short spoken dialogue in which they talk about their names, which connects the end of the dance break to the sung portion of A4. At the scene’s end, an arpeggiation of the G-sharp-major chord underscores the Whore realizing that the Soldier stole her brooch. Thus, LaChiusa creates dramatic action with one song and several interjections in between that extend the song into a scene.
Larson composed the prologue of Rent with the interrupted song technique. “Tune Up #1” introduces the two protagonists, Mark and Roger, and features Mark setting the time and place for the musical. An a cappella voice-mail message sung by Mark’s mother interrupts the song. “Tune Up #2” follows and introduces the characters Collins and Benny. The electricity going out interrupts the song a second time and cues the title song, which brings the entire company to the stage. Larson added a “Tune Up #3” later in the act, connecting “You Okay, Honey?” to “One Song Glory.” The three parts of “Tune Up” mix sung with spoken dialogue (the latter rhythmically notated with unheightened pitches in the score) accompanied by repetitive pitches played by Roger tuning his guitar and chords that punctuate specific words during the sung dialogue. Although each of these parts has different lyrics and specific actions, musical similarities between them suggest that they comprise one interrupted song.

Larson also employed the interrupted song technique for three key moments of Rent: the Act I finale, the opening of Act II, and Act II finale. In these three instances a new song interrupts the ongoing one, breaking it into two parts. The Act I finale depicts the main characters celebrating their lifestyle in “La Vie Bohème.” The song “I Should Tell You” interrupts the action and shifts the focus to Roger and Mimi. Realizing that they are both HIV-positive, they sing how their lives have changed since they met. The scene and the act come to a close with a return to the main song, which Larson titled “La Vie Bohème B.” The same structure occurs in the opening of the second act, after the company performs “Seasons of Love.” “Happy New Year” transitions the characters back to the musical’s action as they plan to break the padlock that Benny put on the door of Mark and Roger’s place. Voice-mail messages by Mark’s mother and Alexi Darling, who offers Mark a job, interrupt the song with new a cappella melodies. The action resumes in “Happy New Year B,” when they succeed in breaking the lock.
and Benny arrives, which culminates in a confrontation scene between him and the bohemians. The Act II finale presents a similar structure as Roger’s diegetic song, “Your Eyes,” interrupts the action and divides it into “Finale A” (when all the bohemians reunite at Mark and Roger’s place and Mimi is close to death) and “Finale B” (when Mimi awakens feeling well, and the company brings the show to an end). Thus, the interrupted song technique bookends both acts of Rent.

Similar to how underscoring and recitatives interrupt “Hello Again” in LaChiusa’s musical, underscoring interrupts the song “Raise the Roof” in Act I, Scene 3 of Lippa’s The Wild Party. The song is in verse-chorus form with a bridge, with the verses featuring always the same music but different lyrics and the choruses always same music and lyrics. Queenie makes an entrance in her own party and invites her guests to join in her debauchery singing verses 1 and 2 and the chorus. An underscoring using the guaracha-style that characterizes the song interrupts it, in which Queenie greets Phil, Madelaine, and Oscar, some of the guests introduced in the previous song, “What a Party.” The song resumes with the same structure: verse 3, verse 4, and the chorus. Now Queenie encourages her guests to drink recklessly. The same underscoring returns now to accompany a dialogue between Burrs, Eddie, and Mae in which they talk about fighting, foreshadowing an actual fight that takes place in the second act between Burrs and Eddie. The nine-measure bridge brings new music and lyrics, and Queenie sings the highest notes in the song. After the dance break, which continues to use the Latin-flavored music, Queenie sings the same structure (verses 5 and 6, and chorus) and a coda, in which she declares the purposes of a

---

5 Until the mid-twentieth century, musical theater songs employed predominantly the verse-refrain form: a verse plus a 32-measure refrain. After the rock revolution in the 1960s and the verse-chorus form’s predominance in pop music, musical theater composers started employing this form as well.

6 Guaracha is a genre of Cuban popular music in a fast tempo that influenced the development of salsa music.
wild party: “Time for playing nice has run . . . We’ve got to do what must be done, so put away that smoking gun . . . time to have some fun.” Lippa simultaneously develops dramatic action and Queenie’s characterization. The underscored passages in “Raise the Roof” reveal the familiarity that the characters have with each other’s eccentricities, and the sung parts further Queenie’s epicurean lifestyle and agenda with such a wild party. All this information is transmitted from the action onstage to the audience through an interrupted song.

Tesori structured the twelve scenes of Caroline, or Change with several songs each, and scenes 1 and 8 feature musical characteristics that identify the interrupted song technique (see Table 2.2.).

Table 2.2. Song sequence in Act I, Scene 1 of Caroline, Or Change.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Song number</th>
<th>Song title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>“16 Feet Beneath the Sea”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>“The Radio”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>“Laundry Quintet”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>“Noah Down the Stairs”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>“The Cigarette”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>“Laundry Finish”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>“The Dryer”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>“I Got Four Kids”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first song exemplifies an interrupted song embedded in a scene. It opens the musical with Caroline’s a cappella humming. When she sings about working in a basement sixteen feet under sea level, the song features a “tempo di washing machine” with groove percussion and a bass line. As the radio and the washing machine gradually comes to life, they interrupt her song with new music, but the music from “16 Feet” pervades sections of “The Radio” and “Laundry Quintet,” forming a musical continuity that groups the first three songs of the scene as one. “Noah Down the Stairs” interrupts the action by introducing Noah’s arrival in the basement and his relationship with Caroline through new music and a theme that will recur throughout the

---

musical. “The Cigarette” features dialogue in recitative between the two characters with Noah asking Caroline to light her cigarette. The accompaniment alternates between chords in whole notes that punctuate the dialogue and the bass line from “16 Feet.” The end of the washing machine cycle interrupts the dialogue, and the dramatic action segues to the equipment singing about Caroline and her situation as a maid and eventually she herself singing about it in “I Got Four Kids.” At the end of this song, she returns to “16 Feet,” reprising its opening lines, which now conclude the scene. Thus, the song “16 Feet Beneath the Sea” is prolonged through the scene and does not find its final cadence until the scene’s closure.

Scene 8 features the same structure as scene 1, and the interrupted song is “The Chanukah Party,” which is also the title that Kushner gave to this scene. This song opens the scene with the Gellman family and Mr. Stopnick enjoying the holiday. As the party progresses through the evening, other circumstances intervene, and Tesori illustrates this musically by making the klezmer music of “The Chanukah Party” reappear throughout, always interrupting the others (see Table 2.3).

Table 2.3. Song sequence in Act II, Scene 8 of Caroline, or Change.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Song number</th>
<th>Song title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>“Dotty and Emmie”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>“I Don’t Want My Child to Hear That”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>“Mr. Stopnick and Emmie”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>“Kitchen Fight”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>“A Twenty Dollar Bill and Why”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>“I Hate the Bus”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>“Moon, Emmie, and Stuart Trio”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“The Chanukah Party” itself is interrupted twice, first by underscoring and spoken dialogue between Noah, Emmie, and Caroline in the kitchen, and then by Mr. Stopinck singing about the Civil Rights unrest in the South. The Gellman grandparents try to change the subject and bring the klezmer music back, leading to a dance break. The song “Dotty and Emmie” follows and
interrupts the action in the living room, focusing on the sung dialogue between the two women in the kitchen. When Caroline interferes asking them to serve the food, music from the scene’s opening song resumes in the accompaniment.

The action suffers several twists after “I Don’t Want My Child to Hear That,” as Emmie and Mr. Stopnick disagree about the progress of Civil Rights and Caroline and Emmie fight after Caroline gets mad at Emmie for responding to Mr. Stopnick. To relieve the tension, Mr. Stopnick gives a $20 bill to Noah, and Rose tries to rekindle the joy of earlier in the evening. The musical accompaniment also attempts to bring klezmer music from “The Chanukah Party” back, but both Rose and the musical accompaniment fail to reanimate the room as Noah leaves for his bedroom and the action shifts to Caroline and Emmie in “I Hate the Bus.” Tesori’s musical architecture and continuity for scene 8 reflect the tension in the plot. As the party would presumably progress without problems through the evening, so would the song that dramatizes it, but disagreements and varying viewpoints between the characters are of such magnitude that they interrupt the progression of both the party and the song.

The interrupted song technique occurs not just in sung-through musicals but also in book musicals. Kurt Weill claimed that the dream sequences that comprise the musical portions of Lady in the Dark (1941) function as “three little one-act operas.” In his study of this musical, bruce mcclung explains: “Like opera, each sequence is self-contained, individually titled, and a mixture of aria and recitative. This being Broadway, the arias are songs, and the recitative patter.” mcclung demonstrates that snippets of the song “My Ship” help unify the three

---


9 Ibid.
sequences until the protagonist sings the complete song in the musical’s denouement. Similarly, Stephen Sondheim used this technique as a dramatic device in *Sunday in the Park with George* (1983). The composer has explained how snippets of a song help develop the plot until it culminates in a complete song:

There is a continuous and continuing love song that isn’t completed until the end of the show. In the song “Sunday in the Park with George,” Dot, in one section, begins a lyrical theme, which is her affection and love for George. This is picked up later in “Color and Light,” and it develops and starts to reach a climax, and just at that point, they break off and they speak. Then in “We Do Not Belong Together” it’s picked up and further developed as if it’s almost where they left off . . . And when their love is finally consummated . . . it all comes together and becomes a completed song in “Move On.”

The choice to embed a song across a scene links LaChiusa, Larson, Lippa, Lunden, and Tesori to the tradition of the American musical, albeit in the nearly sung-through format.

**Song Excerpts**

In this technique the composer uses song excerpts that circumscribe full-blown songs in a scene or act. Composers employ this technique to link an excerpt with another, a song to another song, or a passage in underscoring to a song. Song excerpts may function as reprises, which as will be defined in chapter 3, refer to a song that was introduced previously in the musical and now reappears in a new dramatic context, although this is not always the case. The musicals *Hello Again, Rent, The Wild Party,* and *Caroline, or Change* have scenes that employ song excerpts that function as linking devices to organize the dramatic action and are not song reprises.

---

In *Hello Again* LaChiusa uses song excerpts to introduce and set the time and place for scenes 2, 5, 6, and 9. These excerpts do not derive from other songs (therefore, they are not reprises) nor do they develop into full-fledged songs, but are always sung by characters other than the scene’s main couple. These four scenes present the same structure. Song excerpts open the scene and set the time period of the scene. These excerpts do not find musical closure, seguing to spoken and sung dialogue,\(^\text{11}\) which, in turn, segues to a full-fledged song (see Table 2.4).

Table 2.4. Embedded songs in four scenes of LaChiusa’s *Hello Again*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene 2 (1940s):</th>
<th>“Zei Gezent” (segues to) Sung/spoken dialogue (segues to) “I Got a Little Time”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scene 5 (1950s):</td>
<td>“At the Prom” + “Maien Zeit” (segues to) Sung/spoken dialogue (segues to) “Tom”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 6 (1910s):</td>
<td>“Maien Zeit” (segues to) Sung/spoken dialogue (segues to) “Listen to the Music”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Zei Gezent” sets the 1940s as a “song of war-time best wishes.”\(^\text{12}\) The Actress, the Young Wife, and the Young Thing sing this swing song while the Soldier and the Nurse dance. “At the Prom” introduces the 1950s as “a young Neil Sedaka-type pop singer (the Young Thing) performs.”\(^\text{13}\) The song occurs diegetically, as the Young Wife listens to it on the radio. The Husband enters and switches stations, cutting the song off and choosing “something operatic,”

---

\(^{11}\) I discuss this blend of speaking and singing occurring simultaneously below in the section devoted to underscoring.


\(^{13}\) Ibid., 37.
the song “Maien Zeit” (performed by the Actress).\textsuperscript{14} This is also cut off when the Young Wife turns off the radio. The same excerpt of “Maien Zeit” returns and opens scene 6. In scene 5 it characterized the Husband as an upper-middle-class man who enjoys opera, whereas in scene 6, “a first-class stateroom on a luxury liner.”\textsuperscript{15} The two excerpts that open scene 9 function as music videos that “the company . . . watches . . . using remotes to switch channels.”\textsuperscript{16} The Soldier sings “Rock with Rock,” and the Nurse sings “Angel of Mercy,” which sounds very similar to Madonna’s “Like a Virgin.”

Larson employed song excerpts for two purposes in Rent: to connect one song to another, and to structure the musical’s finale. The song “Seasons of Love” first appears at the beginning of Act II. The company addresses the audience and asks how they measure the passage of a year in their lives, foreshadowing that the act to follow will go through a year in the life of the protagonists. Later in the act, the dramatic action moves from Valentine’s Day (after the song “Take Me or Leave Me”) to some point in the spring (with the song “Without You”). A reprise of the song, which Larson titled “Seasons of Love B,” ushers in the change. This excerpt is a partial contrafactum, since the list of possible ways to measure a year is different than that from “Seasons of Love.” Also, during this song excerpt, “three beds appear downstage. One is a hospital bed, occupied by Angel. Roger sits on one, Joanne is on the other.”\textsuperscript{17} Thus not only does this excerpt link two full-fledged songs, but it also sets the stage for the remainder of the dramatic action.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 45.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 63.
Larson compiled excerpts from several songs to create the musical’s finale. The only new music during the finale is Roger’s song to Mimi, “Your Eyes.” Before this song, the first part of the finale moves from excerpt to excerpt, with some alterations in the lyrics to accommodate the final events of the dramatic action. This first part encompasses excerpts of “Christmas Bells,” “Tune Up,” “Santa Fe,” “I Should Tell You,” Goodbye Love,” “Light My Candle,” “I Should Tell You” a second time, and “Another Day,” which segues to “Your Eyes.” The second part of the finale, following Roger’s solo, features excerpts of “Over the Moon,” Life Support,” “Another Day,” “Will I,” and “Without You.” Larson used basically only song excerpts to generate and develop the dramatic action of the musical’s finale.

Similar to Larson, Lippa used song excerpts in *The Wild Party* to create the dramatic action of the musical’s finale (Act II, Scene 4), while simultaneously embedding two songs, “Make Me Happy” and “How Did We Come to This?” (see Table 2.5).

Table 2.5. Two embedded songs in the finale of *The Wild Party*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Song/song excerpt</th>
<th>Dramatic action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Song: “Make Me Happy”</strong></td>
<td>Burrs storms into the bedroom to find Queenie and Black sleeping together. He pulls out a gun from a drawer and threatens to kill Queenie and Black.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Excerpt: “Out of the Blue”</strong></td>
<td>Queenie tries to calm Burrs down, reminding him that as a vaudevillian actor he should make her laugh, not cry or die.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Excerpt: “Life of the Party”</strong></td>
<td>Burrs believes that he can be the center of attention by killing Queenie and Black.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ending of “Poor Child”</strong></td>
<td>Underscores the fight between Black and Burrs, the gunshot, and Burrs’s death.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Excerpt: “Poor Child”</strong></td>
<td>Queenie tells Black to leave the crime scene.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Song: “How Did We Come to This?”</strong></td>
<td>Queenie looks back into her choices and ponders her situation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Excerpt: “Queenie Was a Blond”</strong></td>
<td>She leaves the apartment, her party, and her guests behind.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The excerpts from “Out of the Blue” and “Life of the Party” are contrafacta. Lippa uses new lyrics for Queenie’s contemplation for her life, but his choice to reuse her first solo song “Out of the Blue” creates a subtext that being threatened by an armed Burrs did come out of the
blue. Kate’s solo “Life of the Party” echoes her carefree attitude with Burrs’s decision to kill Queenie and Black. Kate spends the entire party trying to seduce Burrs, and although he never falls for her, the reprise of her song indicates that he was at least listening to her. The excerpts of “Poor Child” and “Queenie was a Blonde” fulfill the dramatic purpose of a reprise. The former is a contrafactum of “Poor Child.” Black no longer refers to Queenie as a poor child, but uses her name. The words to describe her, however, remain the same from when the song first appeared in Act I. Queenie’s interjections to Black’s singing adds a new layer to the song: not only does this reprise depict Black’s fascination for her but also her desperation to save him. Finally, the excerpt of “Queenie Was a Blonde” features same music and lyrics, providing a cyclic closure to the score and the character development of the protagonist. Lippa concludes his musical leaving the audience to confront what one critic characterized as a peculiar “American version of decadence: intermittently daring, yet self-doubting and inevitably violent.”

In Caroline, or Change, a song excerpt reinforces the musical’s main message, one that the protagonist herself has to face: whether or not to accept change. Tesori achieves that by introducing in Act II, Scene 11 an excerpt from the song “Dotty and Caroline,” first heard in Act I, Scene 4. In the previous scene, that song dramatized a dialogue between Caroline and her friend Dotty while both waited for the bus. Using a melody reminiscent of songs by The Supremes accompanied only by a bass line, Dotty tells Caroline of how her life has changed: she has a boyfriend, she rides his car, and she is allowed to leave work as a maid early to attend college. Dotty points out that Caroline, on the other hand, has changed for the worse and become

---

18 I define and discuss reprises in chapter 3.

a bitter woman. Scene 11 marks the first time Caroline returns to the stage after her fight with Noah in scene 9. Dotty, following Rose’s instructions, goes to Caroline’s house to see whether she has quit her job. Dotty reminds Caroline that she could use this opportunity to make a change, and her arguments for this appear in a contrafactum of that Supremes-tinged song. Dotty uses this song excerpt to point out that changes may not be easy, but everybody accepts them at some point in life. She sings: “You got to move on from the place you’re in. Don’t drown in that basement. Change or sink.” Dotty’s song excerpt verbally poses the question whether or not Caroline can embrace change, functioning as a cue for the protagonist’s eleven o’clock number, “Lot’s Wife.”

In conclusion, when song excerpts occur as a literal reprise or a contrafactum reprise, this song type links songs, making the dramatic action move from song to song, not recurring to spoken dialogue. However, song excerpts are not always reprises. The technique may also introduce new music, as LaChiusa accomplished with song excerpts at the beginning of scenes 2, 5, 6, and 9 of Hello Again. In all of these instances above, song excerpts contribute to the development of the dramatic action as linking devices, while simultaneously providing a dramatic implication, if not a subtext, between the parts that they connect and the songs that they embed.

Themes

LaChiusa, Larson, Lippa, Lunden, and Tesori all employ a considerable number of musical themes, some of which function as leitmotifs, depicting a character, place, situation, or

---

20 Tony Kushner and Jeanine Tesori, Caroline, or Change (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2004), 115.
emotion. I demonstrate below how these themes that are leitmotifs in these composers’ musicals embed and link songs in a scene.

Lunden structured the entire score of *Wings* using themes derived and transformed from “The New Daredevils of the Air,” the song that Emily listens to while experiencing a stroke and later triggers her memory during her treatment. This first song of the musical is presented diegetically and provides the basic musical material upon which the non-diegetic music of *Wings* is constructed. Themes derived from “The New Daredevils of the Air” connect songs, as for example after the stroke and before the song “Globbidge,” when Emily tries to understand what is happening to her. Pearlman’s book specifies the sights and sounds surrounding Emily: “We hear a sharp, abrupt sound like the shattering of glass, or perhaps a propeller trying to start up. . . Images flashing and fading: bright colors, whiteness, clouds, faces peering down examining. Changing spaces, corridors.”

It even prescribes the music for the scene: “themes from the piece [“The New Daredevils of the Air] fractured and fragmented between different instruments.”

The first theme comprises three descending half notes encompassing a major second and a major third (derived from the first three notes of the song). The second theme features the music that in “Globbidge” accompanies the words “how long have I been here wrapped in the dark,” which was the first music that Lunden wrote for the musical and found its way to the main melody of “Daredevils,” more in rhythm than pitch content and intervals.

LaChiusa also uses a theme in conjunction with spoken dialogue and songs in the dramatic action of scenes 5 and 6 of *Hello Again* (see Table 2.4). The composer introduces a

---


22 Ibid.

theme in scene 5 during the dialogue that precedes the Young Wife’s solo, “Tom.” This dialogue between the Young Wife and the Husband unevenly mixes spoken with sung dialogue, and the theme appears in their sung lines when LaChiusa uses it to set the words “the greatest of adventures which a man and woman share is marriage.” The song “Tom,” in turn, echoes the theme at the end of its third A section, when the Young Wife sings that everything surrounding her fantasy about this man she calls Tom marks “the greatest adventures of my life.”

The spoken/sung dialogue between the Husband and the Young Thing in scene 6 divides into two subsections: a waltz tempo, which introduces the characters, and a barcarolle, when they get to know each other better, which leads to the seduction song, “Listen to the Music.” The “adventure” theme bridges these two subsections. The Young Thing speaks, “I remember what you taught me,” and uses the theme to sing the words “lift the wine glass slowly as you bring it to your lips.” The same theme that the Husband used to instruct his wife on marital responsibilities, he uses now to seduce a younger man. The Husband replies, “perfect,” and LaChiusa’s book indicates that a “gentle barcarolle plays.” All characters in Hello Again reveal anxiety over the confusion between love and sex. Scenes 5 and 6 expand the confusion by introducing a theme that focuses on marriage. In the former, the theme complicates the Young Wife’s dilemma of fulfilling her marital duties while fantasizing about another man. In the latter, it adds irony to the values of marriage, since the husband sings it before committing adultery.

---

24 LaChiusa, Hello Again, 42.

25 Ibid., 44.

26 Ibid., 46. The theme occurs once again during the barcarole, after the Young Thing asks the Husband’s wife’s name. The Husband answers Emily and sings the exact same words that he sang with the Wife in scene 5, but with altered rhythm. The theme had set all words with eighth notes, but at this moment of scene 6, some of the words are set to sixteenth notes, implying that the Husband sings it in a hurry, not thinking much about his wife before committing adultery.
Three themes connect songs in Rent. The first theme is the only music that Larson borrowed from Puccini’s La Bohème. The theme from Musetta’s waltz occurs when Roger struggles to write a new song. It first connects the end of “Tune Up #2” to “Rent” in Act I. Roger plays it diegetically on his guitar before the electricity goes out, which is a cue for the song “Rent.” In Act II, the theme marks the climax of Roger’s song for Mimi, “Your Eyes,” as the band plays it non-diegetically at the end of the song. Larson’s stage directions specify: “We hear Musetta’s theme, correctly and passionately. Mimi’s head falls to the side and her arm drops limply off the edge of the table” as Roger sings her name loud.27

The second theme also relates to Roger’s attempt to write a song, but whereas Musetta’s theme refers to the song itself, this second one characterizes the act of composing it. The theme reminds the audience that, similar to Gordon in A New Brain, Roger wants to write one song that will be his legacy to those who knew him. He sings the theme first in “Tune Up #1” and “Tune Up #2,” setting his words to Mark, “I’m writing one great song.” In the theme’s next two instances, Roger sings the words “I’m writing one great song before I . . .,” never uttering the word “die.” In this format, the theme connects “Tune Up #3,” when Mark leaves Roger alone in their place, to “One Song Glory,” when Roger sings about his desire to leave a song behind before dying. Later in Act I, it connects “Another Day” to “Will I.” After Roger refuses Mimi’s invitation to go out and enjoy life, he struggles with his composition and decides to leave. He sings the theme unaccompanied between the two songs. Finally, the theme occurs one last time at the end of the musical. The band plays it without any vocal accompaniment before the company sings the motto of the musical, “no day but today,” one final time. It reinforces that Roger has found his great song (“Your Eyes”) and can live his life following that affirmation.

27 Larson, Rent, 139. The theme also appears in the middle of “La Vie Bohème,” but it does not link or connect any songs.
The third theme occurs every time that the dramatic action moves to the streets of New York City. An ensemble member sings “Christmas bells are ringing” set in an arpeggio of a major triad. It first connects “Rent” to “You Okay Honey?,” introducing the street where Collins and Angel meet. Later it connects “Will I” to “Out on the Street,” when the bohemians leave the group support meeting. The theme links Joanne’s “We’re Okay” to the ensemble song “Christmas Bells.” Finally, the theme opens the first part of the finale in Act II, moving the action from “Voice Mail #6” to “Finale A,” characterizing Christmas time one year after where Act I began. Larson’s use of themes functioning as leitmotifs that embed the musical’s songs provides an operatic structure to what he subtitled “a rock opera.”

Lippa also makes use of themes to connect songs in *The Wild Party*. For example, a descending theme in eight notes characterizes the disastrous effect that the party has on Queenie and Burrs’s marriage. It appears first in the middle of the two songs that comprise Act I, Scene 2, “The Apartment” and “Out of the Blue.” In the former, it accompanies Burrs reading about murder and rape in the newspaper; in the latter, it accompanies Queenie suggesting to Burrs, “I think we’re due for a party.” The theme returns during the song “Let Me Drown” in Act 2, Scene 2. This song marks Burrs’s mad scene and emotional suicide. If Queenie refuses him, he chooses to drown his sorrow in alcohol and inconsequential acts. The song features a sixteen-measure introduction in which he becomes the center of the guests’ attention. The descending theme interrupts and links this introduction to the song. This transition has the descending theme in quarter-note triplets repeating Queenie’s words, “I think we’re due for a,” never actually reaching the word “party.” Queenie’s party has led Burrs to this situation, and her suggestion for

28 The theme occurs once again in the middle of “Christmas Bells,” during an AZT break that the company takes.

a party rings in his inebriated mind. The theme reappears in eight notes after “Let Me Drown,” underscoring Burrs’s mistaking Mae for Queenie, which, in turn, leads to a new song, “The Fight.”

Lippa uses the theme one final time at the end of the musical. The orchestra plays it at the ending of the “Queenie Was a Blond” reprise (see Table 2.5). In all other instances, this descending theme encompassed the following scale degrees: 6, 5, 3, b3, 2, and 1, repeated several times. At the finale Lippa maintained the descending contour, but altered the scale degrees to 1, b7, 5, b5, 4, and 3. Although the theme occurs with different scale degrees, the intervals between them remain almost the same. This change in the music mirrors what happens to Queenie after she meets Black and becomes a widow: essentially the same, but internally changed. Not even the theme survived the wild party without some alteration.

Among the various themes that Tesori created for the score of Caroline, or Change, two embed songs. The first consists of an ascending minor third between two eighth notes followed by a quarter note, encompassing an ascending perfect fifth from the last eighth note. This occurs first in Act I, Scene 1, upon Noah’s entrance and description of Caroline in the song “Noah Down the Stairs.” In Act I, Scene 5, the theme links two songs, “Gonna Pass Me a Law” and “Noah Go to Sleep,” both sung by Caroline. In the former, Caroline (in her house) expresses how her life would be if she could make a change. A dialogue in recitative follows, in which Noah (in his bed) disrupts Caroline’s thoughts and asks her to bid him goodnight and confesses that he likes her despite her temper. The theme accompanies Noah’s lines throughout the dialogue, disappearing when Noah sings about his mother, which segues to “Noah Go to Sleep.” Noah’s presence in this scene, accompanied by the theme that brought him to the dramatic action for the first time, reveals that Caroline cannot help comparing the life that Noah lives with that of her
four children. In “Noah Go to Sleep,” she sings that she takes care of his wellbeing, while her own children lack clothes and food. This song would not have the same impact had Noah and his theme not preceded it.

The other theme appears in Act I, Scene 6. The theme sets Noah’s “Caroline takes my money home” to music, when he starts purposefully leaving money in his pockets so that Caroline can find it. Tesori structures the scene in four songs (see Table 2.6).

Table 2.6. Song sequence in Act I, Scene 6 of *Caroline, or Change*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Song number</th>
<th>Song title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>“Noah Has a Problem”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>“Stuart and Noah”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>“Quarter in the Bleach Cup”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>“Roosevelt Petrucius Coleslaw”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The theme occurs between the songs, allowing the dramatic action to move from one to another. “Stuart and Noah” ends with Caroline removing “the change from the bleach cup and [putting] it in her pocket.”

Noah sings the theme solo with few accompanying chords that emphasize the words “Caroline,” “money,” and “home.” It lasts only three measures and segues to the opening of “Quarter in the Bleach Cup.”

Kusher’s directions indicate that at the end of “Quarter in the Bleach Cup,” “Caroline takes the money out of the bleach cup and puts it in her purse.” The theme returns now to link this song to “Roosevelt Petrucius Coleslaw,” the Act I finale. Noah uses the theme to sing that Caroline took the money and imagines that he is now the topic of conversation at the Thibodeaux household. The scene, however, proves Noah wrong. In her house Caroline calls to her children and gives them a quarter each. A strumming guitar vamp, which will later be the opening of

---

30 Kushner and Tesori, *Caroline, or Change*, 53.

31 Ibid, 56.
“Roosevelt Petrucius Coleslaw,” underscores Caroline calling her children. When she “puts a quarter into each hand,” the orchestra underscores the action with Noah’s theme. Caroline has an unaccompanied recitative in which she tells the children that the money is theirs to keep. The guitar strumming returns, marking the beginning of Act I’s final song, in which the children dream of what they can buy with the money, while Noah continues to believe that he is their hero.

Modulation helps in the transition from theme to song. “Stuart and Noah” is in B-flat major. The “Caroline takes my money home” theme modulates to A major. “Quarter in the Bleach Cup” modulates to C major. The theme acquires its own key also in the transition to “Roosevelt Petrucius Coleslaw.” Noah’s sings it in G major, and again chords punctuate some key words in recitative style. The guitar strumming that takes the scene to Caroline’s house modulates back to A major, a key that Tesori maintains until halfway through “Roosevelt Petrucius Coleslaw.” Noah’s “Caroline takes my money home” theme connecting the songs of scene 6 helps the dramatic action shift from the Gellman family’ reality, where change can be given away, to that of the Thibodeaux’s, where quarters can provide necessities. As it characterizes an action, Noah’s theme functions as a leitmotif and musically depicts how the choices in one house affect and change the other.

**Underscoring**

The practice of underscoring dialogue marks the most employed of the five techniques discussed in this chapter and can be considered a staple of these nearly sung-through musicals. I

---

32 Ibid., 57.

33 The song does not cadence in the tonic key because the music abruptly stops when Caroline pockets the money.
discuss below how underscoring of both spoken dialogue and passages that mix spoken with sung lines embeds songs in a scene.

In *Wings* underscoring of spoken dialogue embeds songs in the final moments of the dramatic action. Amy and Emily walk together in the snow, and although Emily’s speech abilities have improved, she still struggles to find the right word. Emily describes a dream she had the previous night: a person came to her, made her leave her body, and she was able to see herself from the clouds. Emily has a relapse and dies imagining that she soars on wings (see Table 2.7).

Table 2.7. Two embedded songs in the finale of *Wings.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Music</th>
<th>Dramatic action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Underscoring: theme from “Snow”</td>
<td>Spoken dialogue between Amy and Emily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Song: “Snow”</td>
<td>Emily remembers the word snow and how it feels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underscoring: theme from “Snow”</td>
<td>Spoken dialogue about a past group meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No music</td>
<td>Spoken dialogue about Emily’s dream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Song: “Wings”</td>
<td>Emily remembers the sensation of flying and dies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both underscored passages portray Emily’s struggle with aphasia and use the main theme from “Snow,” which was the first complete song that Lunden and Pearlman created for the musical, before “The New Daredevils of the Air” and the idea of fragmenting it throughout the score. Lunden has explained that ultimately he and Pearlman liked that this sounded new at this point in the musical because “it’s the only time really when somebody else sings with her [Emily], or anybody sings with anybody else.” The song “Wings” moves the dramatic action to Emily’s mind, and, as in the first half of the musical, she articulates her ideas and sensations in song without a speech impediment. Not only does the short passage without music emphasize the description of Emily’s dream, since the absence of music contrasts with the underscoring and

---

34 Jeffrey Lunden, interview by author, New York, NY, June 12, 2015.
songs that structure the scene, but it also switches the perspective through which the dramatic action presents the protagonist’s death.

The musicals *Hello Again*, *The Wild Party*, *Rent*, and *Caroline, or Change* feature underscoring of dialogue that unevenly mix spoken and sung lines. The composer leaves the music constant and assigns some lines to be spoken and others sung in the same dialogue. This technique embeds songs in scenes 2, 5, 6, and 9 of *Hello Again* (see Table 2.4). LaChiusa accomplishes this through themes, such as the “adventure” theme discussed above in scenes 5 and 6. The composer also employs it in scenes 3, 4, and 7. Scene 3, which features the Nurse seducing the College Boy in the 1960s, feature the technique surrounding the nurse’s solo, “In Some Other Life.” Alternating between the song’s main theme and solo bongos, underscoring allows the Nurse to sing her lines as she seduces the College Boy, and he to speak hesitantly. As he falls for her seduction, the College Boy sings some of his lines in recitative (using repeated pitches within a small range), which segues to the nurse’s song. After the song, the solo bongos remain constant. The College Boy has a tuneful melody when he sings “I might not be needing a nurse soon,” and the Nurse speaks her lines. The main theme of the song reappears, but now fragmented in different instruments accompanying the College Boy shouting for the Nurse after she leaves.

Scene 4 shifts to the College Boy meeting with the Young Wife in a movie theater of the 1930s, and the technique of underscoring a mix of spoken and sung lines predominates from the beginning of the dramatic action to the scene’s main song, “Story of My Life.” The beguine that characterizes the song and a solo violin underscore spoken dialogue between the College Boy and the Young Wife until he starts singing a line from the Nurse’s “In Some Other Life” to

---

seduce the Young Wife. The beguine vamp underscores some short spoken lines by the Young Wife, seguing to the actual song.

Scene 7 dramatizes the sexual encounter between the Writer and the Young Thing in the 1970s. The technique embeds three songs, “Montage,” “Safe,” and “The One I Love.” Disco music in “Montage” opens the scene with the writer envisioning his newest project. When he sees the Young Thing on the dance floor, disco music underscores a dialogue in which the Writer sometimes speaks, sometimes sings his lines, while the Young Thing speaks his. When the seduction moves to the writer’s bedroom, the Young Thing sings his first line, which segues to him seducing the Writer in his solo song, “Safe.” The song climaxes with both screaming “you, you,” and the music stops. Eighth-note chord arpeggiation underscores a dialogue in which the Writer sings and the Young Thing speaks, creating the Writer’s fantasy of a “lovely post-coital atmosphere” and the song “The One I Love.” Music reminiscent of “Montage” brings the fantasy to an end and underscores the scene’s final dialogue, in which at first both speak, but towards the end, they sing their lines as they decide to go out to eat together.

Lippa uses the underscoring technique to create a more systematic blurring of singing and speaking than LaChiusa. He embeds songs in The Wild Party through well-defined self-contained sections that are sometimes sung dialogues, other times spoken with underscoring (see Table 2.8).

Table 2.8. Embedment of songs in Act I, Scene 3 of The Wild Party.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Music</th>
<th>Dramatic action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Song: “He Was Calm”</td>
<td>The party guests and Queenie observe Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underscoring #1</td>
<td>Spoken dialogue between party guests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sung</td>
<td>Black observes the party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underscoring #2</td>
<td>Spoken dialogue between party guests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sung dialogue</td>
<td>Black and Kate sing about Queenie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underscoring #3</td>
<td>Spoken dialogue between Black, Queenie, and Burrs, then Black and Kate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

Ibid., 58.
Lippa divides underscoring #1 in three parts: the first a dialogue between Kate, Phil, Oscar, and Black (the D-Major music is marked “ricky ticky tempo”), the second a dialogue between Sam and Dolores (marked “Broadway ‘Two,’” in E major), and the third a dialogue between Burrs and Kate (marked as “tempo di Look at Me Now,” Kate’s entrance song earlier in the scene, in A major). Black’s first solo keeps the same key as the previous underscoring. Underscoring #2 divides in two parts: a dialogue between Nadine and Madelaine (the music, in E-flat major, foreshadows Madelaine’s “Old-Fashioned Love Story” from the next scene) and a dialogue between Eddie, Mae, and Burrs (marked “tempo di “Sweet Georgia Brown,” in E major). Black and Kate’s sung dialogue modulates to D major, and when Queenie joins the dialogue, underscoring music modulates to F major. Towards the end of underscoring #3, Lippa modulates to C minor and changes the time signature from 4/4 to 6/8, musical characteristics that segue and become “Poor Child.” Thus, through different keys and alternation between sung and spoken sections, Lippa introduces the audience to the eccentricities of the party’s guests and the conflicts of the four protagonists. He repeats this systematic alternation of sung and spoken dialogue in Act I, Scene 5 (when underscoring embeds the songs “The Juggernaut” and “Wild, Wild Party”) and Act II, Scene 2, when underscoring embeds the songs “Who Is This Man?,” “The Gal for Me,” “I’ll Be There,” and “Listen to Me.”

Larson frequently makes use of vamps to underscore passages of spoken dialogue and move the dramatic action from one song to another (see Table 2.9).
Table 2.9. Song vamps in *Rent*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Song Order</th>
<th>Act</th>
<th>Vamp</th>
<th>Dramatic Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between “Santa Fe” and “I’ll Cover You”</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>Opening riff of “I’ll Cover You”</td>
<td>Mark leaves Collins and Angel to go convince Roger to go out with them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the middle of “La Vie Bohème”</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>Opening bass line from “La Vie Bohème”</td>
<td>The bohemians introduce each other presentations in honor of bohemia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between “Happy New Year B” and “Take Me or Leave Me”</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>Main theme from “I Should Tell You”</td>
<td>Mark describes what has happened to each character between New Years and Valentine’s Day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between “Seasons of Love B” and “Without You”</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>Opening riff of “Without You”</td>
<td>Roger decides not spend the night with Mimi.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between “Contact” and “I’ll Cover You (reprise)”</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>Opening riff of “Seasons of Love”</td>
<td>Mark, Maureen, and Mimi deliver their eulogies at Angel’s funeral.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between “I’ll Cover You (reprise)” and “Halloween”</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>Opening riff of “Halloween”</td>
<td>Mark accepts to work for Buzzline.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between “Goodbye Love” and “What You Own”</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>High-hats and bass drum</td>
<td>Collins cannot pay for Angel’s funeral, and Benny accepts to do so.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intro to “What You Own”</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>Opening riff of “What You Own”</td>
<td>Mark speaks to the camera at Buzzline and hates the job.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the dialogue between “Santa Fe” and “I’ll Cover You” (in Act I) and “Goodbye Love” and “What You Own” (in Act II), Larson entered the words metrically in the music, notating their rhythms in unheightened pitch. The latter’s dialogue accompanied by high-hat and a bass drum was rapped in *Rent*’s original Off-Broadway production. After the musical moved to Broadway, the rhythmic accompaniment was maintained, but the words were spoken as dialogue.

The mixing of singing and speaking above underscoring occurs in Act I, Scene 5 of *Caroline, or Change*. The song “No One Waitin’” is a diegetic blues song that the radio sings. Initially, it underscores a spoken dialogue between Caroline and Emmie. Caroline questions Emmie why she was out on the day that the president has been assassinated, and Emmie explains

---

herself. “No One Waitin’” comments on the action with lines like “Nobody’s arm to cradle my head, to talk about news, talk about views, talk about change, about the president’s death.” When Emmie says that she was having fun, the music changes from 6/8 to 4/4, modulates from C major to E major, the tempo indication reads “hullabaloo,” and the song becomes non-diegetic. Emmie sings about the fun she had that day and her lack of interest in mourning JFK. The radio accompanies Emmie as backing vocals to her singing. Emmie’s statement that she has “no tears to shed for no dead white president,” brings back the music of “No One Waitin,’” which diegetically underscores the mother-daughter dialogue again. But now Caroline sings her lines in recitative, and Emmie speaks her. Tesori makes the underscoring diegetic, taking the technique of mixing speaking and singing to a level that the other sung-through musicals considered here never achieve.38

Underscoring also occurs in the book musical, as in “Make Believe” in Show Boat, the bench scene in Rodgers and Hammerstein’s Carousel (during the song “If I Loved You”), and in all of the book scenes of Stephen Sondheim’s Passion. In his book The Broadway Musical, Joseph Swain argues that the shift from spoken to sung within a number differentiates Richard Rodgers’s partnership with Lorenz Hart from the one with Oscar Hammerstein II. In the musicals with the latter, structuring a musical consisted of “decreasing the number of songs, but arranging them within the play more skillfully. . . . To hear the songs repeated almost immediately after short dialogue was unknown . . . [and] the effect of these frequent reprises is to integrate song and spoken word much more closely, but just as important, to create another level of dramatic action.”39 Swain discusses how this occurs in the score of Oklahoma! and

38 A similar effect occurs in “Aftermath,” Act II, Scene 10.

Indeed, one can suppose that in the musicals studied here, the composers continue and a lesson that they learned from Jerome Kern, Richard Rodgers, and Stephen Sondheim, expanding it to beyond the American musical theater’s Golden Age. LaChiusa even mentioned the bench scene from Carousel as an inspiration for his compositional style.41

In these sung-through musicals, underscoring has several functions. It can introduce a scene and lead to a main song, or it may link songs of a scene. Underscoring can also change the setting of a scene. In the finale of Wings, underscoring changes the perspective from Emily’s surroundings to her mind. In Act II of Rent, underscoring transitions from the sensuality of “Contact” to the sadness of “I’ll Cover You (Reprise).” Underscoring in these nearly sung-through musicals creates dialogue scenes that mix spoken and sung lines fluctuating above continuous music more constantly and intricately than in book musicals. The mixing of sung and spoken lines in the same dialogue, not just within the same number (as Swain argues characterizes Rodgers and Hammerstein’s musicals), but between songs set the musicals studied here not just apart from those with a song-cycle structure, but also from the conventions of the traditional book musical. As the composers assign lines in a dialogue to be alternatively sung and spoken above continuous music, their music functions as both underscoring and accompaniment.

**Spoken Lines and Dialogue**

In this section I discuss the means through which composers treat short passages of spoken dialogue with no musical accompaniment. I argue that these short portions of spoken dialogue circumscribe songs, enhancing the development of the action through three different

---

40 Ibid., 105–38.

means: as a linking device between songs, to delineate different locales within a scene, and as a dramatic contrast. Functionally, these short passages of spoken dialogue are not different from how they occur in a book musical, but because they are briefer in a sung-through musical and the songs do not expand or further the dialogue but seemingly continue the action, the transition from song to book is not clearly defined. The musical’s composer thus explores the differences between speaking and singing in a manner not achievable in a book musical.

Sections of spoken dialogue may occur in the middle of the song sequence to introduce a song, linking events from previous scenes or those from outside the dramatic action to the song. In *Wings* spoken dialogue links the songs “Let Me Call You Sweetheart” and “Recipe for Cheesecake.” Emily and other victims of aphasia interact during a group therapy session. Pearlman’s dialogue reveals how much each one struggles to speak, climaxing with the cook Billy explaining his recipe for cheesecake, but not always pronouncing the word “cheap” correctly. Emily and Billy share another short spoken dialogue after “Like the Clouds” and before Amy walks in with a recording of “The New Daredevils of the Air.” In *The Wild Party*, a three-line unaccompanied spoken dialogue introduces Act II, Scene 3. Black asks Queenie if she wants him to leave the party, leading to her asking about his past in the song “Tell Me Something.” In *Caroline, or Change*, spoken dialogue introduces Act I, Scene 4. Dotty and Caroline greet each other before the music of “Dotty and Caroline” begins. In Act II, Scene 9, Noah asks Caroline if she found his $20 bill, and she says that she did and the money is now hers. This forms a very short unaccompanied spoken dialogue that links the songs “The $20 Bill” and “Caroline and Noah Fight.”

Larson employed spoken passages without music slightly different than Lunden, Lippa, and Tesori. Mark functions as a narrator in *Rent*, setting the place and providing background
information about other characters. He always speaks these interjections between songs. Some are underscored (as shown in Table 2.9 above), others are not, such as the very beginning of the musical, leading to “Tune Up #1,” and the intro of “Today 4U,” in which he describes Tom Collins. Joanne and Maureen’s spoken dialogue links Mark’s underscoring after “Happy New Year B” to “Take Me or Leave Me.” It reveals that they do not agree on performance choices for a new protest, prompting them so sing about their differences in the duet. Larson’s lyric sketches for this song date from January 1, 1996, and the song’s title appears for the first time in a song list that Larson compiled on January 11, 1996. The script dated January 16, 1996, nine days before previews were scheduled to begin, is the first to contain “Take Me or Leave Me” plotted. “Take Me or Leave Me” was one of the last additions to the musical and probably the last song Larson ever composed. The unaccompanied dialogue was probably necessary to fit this new song into the dramatic action.

The use of strictly spoken dialogue can be used for dramatic effect, contrasting with what is sung. This technique functions as the opposite of what happens in the traditional book musical, in which songs occur when speaking is no longer enough for expression or characterization. In these nearly sung-through musicals with the embedded-song format, singing is so prominent that eventually the characters reach a point in which singing is not enough to change or to enhance expression, and they resort to speaking. This happens in all of the five musicals considered in this chapter.


In Wings the first time that Emily reacts to a stimulus occurs with spoken lines, Amy plays “Let Me Call You Sweetheart” on her accordion, and Emily reacts “stomping her foot uncontrollably.” Amy, overwhelmed by the situation, speaks in an attempt to calm Emily and subsequent shouts to the nurse. This segues to the second part of Emily’s “I’ll Come Back to That.” In “Malacats,” as the dramatic action moves from “I Don’t Trust Him” to that song, Emily is overwhelmed and resorts to speaking. This marks the first time that Emily hears herself and realizes that her speech does not make sense. “A look of horror comes across her face,” and the character who had sung all lines so far in the musical speaks her way out of unconsciousness.

Scene 10 of LaChiusa’s Hello Again reaches a dramatic point in which neither singing nor the blending of speaking and singing above underscoring is enough to portray the Senator’s questions regarding the differences between love and sex. LaChiusa resorts to spoken dialogue to further the musical’s main point and embed the two songs of the scene. The scene opens with a blend of speaking and singing with underscoring that reprises music from “Hello Again.” It segues to the Senator’s “The Bed Was Not My Own” in which he exposes his doubts about his sexuality and whether sex turns people into lovers. At the end of the song, he is at the Whore’s garret, and a spoken dialogue between the two ensues in which the Senator admires the Whore and asks if they were lovers. The dialogue expands the theme introduced in his song, and the absence of music gives the question and the Senator’s doubts, which are shared by other characters in all previous scenes, an impact not previously attained. A reprise of “Hello Again”

45 Lunden and Pearlman, Wings, 9.
46 Ibid., 16.
47 LaChiusa, Hello Again, 73.
brings the musical to an end. Scene 10 enacts no seduction or sex, and in a crucial moment of the finale, LaChiusa makes the last scene focus solely on the conflict between love and sex.

Maureen’s protest song in Rent, “Over the Moon,” amplifies the magnitude of the spoken word by contrasting with its neighboring songs, “Christmas Bells” and “La Vie Bohème.” It happens diegetically, as Maureen sings it as part of her protest against gentrification in the Lower East Village. The song blends singing with speaking, but the spoken passages feature no underscoring. Given that the dramatic action both before and after Maureen’s performance is non-diegetically sung, Larson’s choice to make parts of the performance spoken makes the words stand out by contrast. In the traditional book musical, when a character performs diegetically, he or she breaks into song (as Julie’s “Bill” in Show Boat and Adelaide’s “A Bushel and a Peck” in Guys and Dolls), but “Over the Moon” occurs in a nearly sung-through musical, and the performance starts out and develops for some time with spoken lines only.48

In Act II, Scene 2 of Lippa’s The Wild Party, spoken dialogue contrasts with the sung parts and aids the characterization of Burrs. After Black sings “I’ll Be There” to Queenie, Burrs enters and apologizes for previously insulting Queenie. He is jealous of Black and instead of continuing the singing from where Black left off he speaks to her. Kate’s arrival in the scene cues the quartet “Listen to Me,” which ends abruptly with Burrs hitting Queenie. Another spoken dialogue follows in which Quennie announces that she is not stopping the party after Burrs’s request and leaves with Black. Kate points out how dramatic Queenie can be and realizes that Burrs is not listening. Lippa’s book indicates: “Burrs is muttering, whimpering. . . . Burrs is lost

48 The eulogies for Angel during the funeral are another example in which singing is not enough and the character resort to speaking. By having Maureen, Mimi, and Mark speak their homage to Angel between two songs (“Contact” and “I’ll Cover You [reprise]”), Larson gives their eulogies a contrasting impact. However, he stipulated that the eulogies should be underscored by the opening riff of “Seasons of Love” (see Table 2.9), alluding to this song’s message: “How do you measure a year in the life? . . . In the way that she cried or the way that he died?”
in his own world. It’s time for a performance of his own,”49 which segues into “Let Me Drown.” Burrs sings about his desperation and obsession in “Listen to Me” and “Let Me Drown,” but his confused emotional state prevents him from singing his apology to Queenie.

Act II, Scene 9 of Caroline, or Change takes the characters from singing to speaking, revealing the climax of a scene. Scene 9 dramatizes a fight between Noah and Caroline, after she takes the $20 bill that she found in his pocket. At the climax of the fight, Noah sings: “President Johnson has built a bomb special made to kill all Negroes . . . I hope he drops his bomb on you.”50 Offended, Caroline speaks her reply to Noah describing the temperature of hell. A sustained C in the bass slowly fades out, leaving the orchestra mute when she speaks, “Hell’s so hot it makes flesh fry.”51 Then Caroline sings a cappella to Noah, “And hell’s where Jews go when they die.” She is so angry that she becomes paradoxically calm and is able to sing this line. She speaks her final lines, “take your twenty dollars, baby. So long, Noah, goodbye,” which segues to “Aftermath.” Transitioning between singing a cappella and speaking contrasts with the continuous singing that characterizes the musical, revealing that Caroline has indeed reached her emotional climax.

Tesori uses this contrast between speaking and singing in Caroline’s final lines in the musical. Noah asks Caroline if she misses sharing a cigarette. She first speaks, “You bet I do, Noah,” and then sings, “you bet,” accompanied by the theme that first brought Noah to the stage in Act I, Scene 1. This contrast reveals that Caroline, despite her temper and frustration, does like Noah. Singing is not enough for her to express how she misses sharing her cigarette with him.

50 Ibid., 104.
51 Ibid.
By allowing Caroline to first speak her reply to Noah, Tesori momentarily alters, and thus deepens, the protagonist’s mode of expression and characterization. In addition, not only does this moment bring the main plot to a close, but it also connects the song “Underwater” to the epilogue, “Emmie’s dream.”

Oscar Hammerstein II believed that the art of storytelling through song consisted not of dialogue jumping into song, but the former oozing into the latter. The embedded-song structure allows the nearly sung-through musical to participate in the tradition of musical theater initiated by Rodgers and Hammerstein because it drastically reduces the amount of dialogue that oozes into song, or even replaces dialogue with short sung lines.

Analyses of these nearly sung-through musicals demonstrate that the embedded-song structure differentiates these musicals from the conventional book musical, since musico-dramatic devices other than long stretches of spoken dialogue lead to or segue from a song. Research on these musicals’ inception explains the reasons why composers ended up structuring their musical in this embedded-song process and how they decided what was to be sung and what was to be spoken.

For Lunden and Pearlman, the structure resulted from their decision to spread themes from “The New Daredevils of the Air” through the score. When Arthur Kopit, author of the play Wings, authorized the adaptation to a musical, he suggested that Lunden and Pearlman explore the musical side of aphasia. They visited the New York State Music Therapist Association at the Beth Abraham Hospital in the Bronx, where they saw victims of aphasia singing and even dancing and swinging to their own singing even if they were not able to speak correctly. They

---

interviewed the head of that department, who explained that if the brain blocks the pathway to speaking, she had to find other pathways to unblock it, “So she literally was having people sing ‘Hello, how are you? Hello, how are you?’ because [the victims of aphasia] could get the words without thinking about it.”53 After this experience, Lunden and Pearlman decided to change Amy’s occupation from a therapist in Kopit’s original play to a music therapist. Inspired by these events, Pearlman had the idea of starting the musical with a Lucky Lindy song that breaks into pieces after the stroke and later helps the protagonist get her memory back. They wrote and recorded “The New Daredevils of the Air,” and Lunden used its music to structure the rest of the score.54

The presence and absence of music in the structure of Wings was also a result from Lunden and Pearlman’s choice to differentiate activities in the hospital from those in Emily’s mind. Songs depict her perspective of the hospital and the stroke; spoken dialogue depicts the dramatic action outside her mind. Lunden has explained:

There was always going to be spoken dialogue in the first half, just because the first half is mostly her, and I think that part of what convinced me that it was worth adapting [Kopit’s original play] was that music allows you to go inside somebody’s head. And the way the play was structured, it was all inside her head, and all of the wrong conclusions that she’s coming up with, and ultimately becoming self-aware.55

Thus, Emily’s real situation differs from what the audience witnesses. As Frank Rich put it, “The audience never sees the patient as the world sees her.”56

53 Jeffrey Lunden, interview by author, New York, NY, June 12, 2015.

54 Ibid. “The New Daredevils of the Sky” was not the first song that they composed for the musical. They had already written the beginning of the musical and the duet “Snow” when they wrote “Daredevils.” In my interview with Lunden, he was not sure in which order he composed subsequent songs and themes, nor how much these new songs and themes made him go back and make changes to “Daredevils.”

55 Ibid.

LaChiusa obtained a nearly sung-through structure because he purposefully employed ambiguity between singing and speaking. He has explained: “I like to keep an audience guessing. A character might sing a line, speak the next, sing the next five, then deliver a spoken monologue and then the number. I’ll probably go to musical hell for it.”\footnote{Michael John LaChiusa, “I Sing of America’s Mongrel Culture,” \textit{The New York Times}, November 14, 1999.} This ambiguity defines how audiences experience musical theater: “It causes great anxiety in the audience so that you have a long stretch of music or long, long stretch of dialogue. It tricks the ear, tricks the emotional template, subconsciously, for the audience . . . they feel [the musical] as a living thing.”\footnote{Michael John LaChiusa, interview by author, New York, NY, June 22, 2015.} He has also argued that playing with audience’s expectation helps him shape a musical: “You have to be choosy about what’s sung, what’s not sung. It might not be clear, but there is definitely a reason why something sounds something. And it’s not always a matter of importance, [but] it’s a matter of emotion. Sometimes if a character lies, I may have them sing in pastiche, then speaking the truth.”\footnote{Ibid.} LaChiusa explains that he has expanded the ambiguity between singing and speaking that George Abbot introduced in musical theater during its Golden Age. Indeed, Kim Kowalke writes that in Abbot’s musical comedies the “distinction between speaking and singing was less marked than in the musical play, thus obviating the need for extended musical scenes to make the transition from dialogue to song.”\footnote{Kim H. Kowalke, “Theorizing the Golden Age Musical: Genre, Structure, Syntax,” \textit{A Music-Theoretical Matrix: Essays in Honor of Allen Forte (Part V)}, ed. David Carson Berry, \textit{Gamut} 6, no. 2 (2013): 160.}

The sung-through structure of \textit{Rent} resulted from Larson following an operatic model, Puccini’s \textit{La Bohème}. The original idea was indeed to update the opera to the twentieth century.
Playwright Billy Aronson saw a production of *La Bohème* at the Met and realized that the struggles, poverty, and disease of the artists portrayed in the opera resonated with New York City of the late 1980s. He began his project in 1988 and contacted Playwright Horizons for a composer. Aronson was given two names, one of which was Larson’s. After Aronson dropped the project in 1991, Larson consulted both Henry Murger’s book *Scènes de la vie de bohème*, upon which the opera is based, and the opera itself to create his own version of the story.

Michael Greif, director of the original production of *Rent*, confirms opera as *Rent’s* model:

> Jonathan was a very dedicated student of Broadway musicals, and I think one of the reasons why it worked uptown [on Broadway] was because it is such a good blend of his love for traditional musical forms and his loyalty to *La Bohème* as a structure, which is a structure we all know works as a musical, as an operatic form, and then some of his adventure-ness as a composer and also as a thinker.

In the same interview, Greif says that he and Larson constantly discussed how the musical was similar to and different from *La Bohème*. Greif explains that his job was “to know the [opera’s] libretto as little as possible to make sure the events, the plot, the passions, the personal coasts of *Rent* were not dependent on a working knowledge of *La Bohème*. But I think he loved the fact that he was going back, harking back to that kind of classical form.”

Larson wrote songs for specific dramatic moments, but struggled with how to connect them. This was not resolved until after Larson’s death in January 1996. Greif introduced Mark’s narrative intermediations to facilitate the transitions from one song to another. He found them in a script of a previous version of *Rent*, which had been workshopped a year before, and “the

---


62 Interview with Michael Greif: Raw Footage, videotaped in New York City on August 26, 2003, VHS NCOX 2166, directed by Michael Kantor, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Billy Rose Theatre Division, Theatre on Film and Tape Archive, New York.

63 Ibid.
language for those additions was taken from stage directions and character biographies [that] Larson had written.⁶⁴ Since Larson was no longer present to discuss the additions and the music that would accompany them, it becomes clear why Greif and music director Tim Weill chose to underscore them with vamps from already plotted songs or with no music at all.

Lippa reached this structure because he started out with the idea of creating a sung-through piece. He told me that Henry Krieger’s Dreamgirls (1981), a musical that historian Ethan Mordden characterizes as “so constantly sung that some think of it as America’s pop opera,”⁶⁵ as an influence. The composer claimed: “If Dreamgirls hadn’t existed, The Wild Party would not exist. I wanted The Wild Party to move strictly when it came down to what it looked like, how it moved, how it was always dancing, to be like Dreamgirls in that respect.”⁶⁶

Eventually, however, he realized that he had to employ elements of the traditional book musical to structure the plot of The Wild Party. He first read Joseph Moncure March’s poem in 1995, and since he did not write lyrics at the time, he decided to set the entire poem to music, without altering the words. He also intended this to be similar to Andrew Lloyd Webber’s Cats, a musical structured by poems.⁶⁷ As Lippa developed the project, he realized that such structure was not going to work. He explains: “The poem was almost exclusively third-person narrative, and I got weary of writing in the third person. I wanted to write ‘I feel…,’ ‘I am…’,⁶⁸ so he

---


⁶⁶ Andrew Lippa, interview by author, New York, NY, June 20, 2015.

⁶⁷ Andrew Lippa, “An Interview with Andrew Lippa,” in New York City Center Playbill (July/August 2015), 20.

⁶⁸ Ibid.
decided to write the lyrics and book himself. Some passages of the musical quote March’s poem verbatim, but Lippa has explained how the source material slowly receded: “I suppose I used the poem most heavily for the first few scenes. You love source material when you find it, but sooner or later you have to trash it, you have to make it contemporary.”69

Approaching The Wild Party from a book perspective helped Lippa to compose more songs. He confirms, “Despite that there’s very little speaking, the book writing was the structural element, the notion of who does what, when, and how the story gets told.”70 As he conceived passages to connect the songs and develop dramatic action, he was faced with the question of what should be sung and what should be spoken. He has argued: “So much of these things are just instinctual, and you just go. You go on based on what feels right as you’re doing it, the choice is mainly instinctive.”71 Indeed, these passages, analyzed above, successfully embed the songs, leading critic Ben Brantley to extol Lippa’s book and lyrics and how they “have expanded the focus of March’s notoriously cool-blooded poem to depict a quest not just for novel sensation but for that funny thing called love.”72

Caroline, or Change acquired its nearly sung-through structure because Tesori received a fully completed script when she joined the creative team. Kushner wrote it after a San Francisco Opera commission, which partnered him with composer Bobby McFerrin. The composer, however, dropped the project, and Kushner took it to director George C. Wolfe, with whom he

---


70 Andrew Lippa, interview by author, New York, NY, June 20, 2015.

71 Ibid.

had worked previously on *Angels in America*, and Wolfe decided that it should be a musical not an opera.\(^{73}\) They considered Tesori, but it took them a year to convince her to join the project.\(^{74}\) She did not think that she was the right person to musicalize this story, but recalled that after “talking to [Kushner] about his intentions, I began to understand what he was after.”\(^{75}\) Another reason she was reluctant to join the creative team was that she did not “like just setting lyrics. I want to bring my own life experiences into play.”\(^{76}\)

Kushner and Tesori were asked to collaborate on another musical project that never materialized, but proved to them that they could work together, and Kushner asked her to take another look at Caroline.\(^{77}\) After Tesori joined the creative team, the main structure of the book did not change: 12 scenes and an epilogue. She musicalized Kushner’s words, such as Emmie’s “I Hate the Bus,” which was the first music Tesori composed for the musical.\(^{78}\) But as the project developed, she got involved in writing and editing lyrics. Moreover, she has explained, “There was no simultaneity when I got the libretto,”\(^{79}\) that is, Kushner had not written overlapping lines, but a play in verse. She created the ensemble numbers by overlapping lines or asking Kushner to write some anew. She musicalized scenes, created songs out of monologues, and the various means to connect them. She let some lines be spoken so that the contrast with singing could

---


\(^{76}\) Ibid.

\(^{77}\) Kushner and Tesori, *Caroline, or Change*, xii.


function the opposite way that it does in the conventional book musical. She concludes: “I think the speaking becomes the uncomfortable thing when most of it is sung. And it causes attention to itself in a way.”

Tesori’s craftsmanship led critics to describe the musical as “deliberately fragmented sung-through score” and a musical in which songs are not knit sequentially, but “seamlessly knit.”

The embedded-song structure in these musicals resembles musical architecture of grand opera, in which accompanied recitatives, ariosos, and arias create a musical continuum. Joseph Kerman explained the architecture of grand opera by arguing that Verdi blended compositional techniques by Gluck, Mozart, and Rossini “into a more continuous texture . . . accomplished partly by approximately Gluckian methods in recitatives, but chiefly a new technique known at the time as parlante.” Yet, at the same time the embedded-song structure relies on conventions rooted in the book musical. As Joseph Swain puts it, integration in the book musical, “Where it seems as if the dialogue interrupts the song as much as the song interrupts the dialogue, creates the dramatic action that the character songs alone would lack. The dramatic continuity takes place across the numbers, rather them within them.” Communicating in songs in a nearly sung-through musical with the embedded-song structure combines these two influences, resulting in

---

84 Swain, 105.
what Tesori has called “a people’s opera and a reflection of America at its best, with all its
different sounds, expressing collective and private worlds.”\textsuperscript{85}

\textsuperscript{85} Quoted in Simi Horwitz, “‘Change’ Panel: A Musical Raises Questions Not Easily Resolvable,”
Chapter 3

Song Types and the Presentation of the Dramatic Action

“Song is the joint art of words and music, two arts under emotional pressure coalescing into a third.” According to Mark Steyn, this is a definition of song found in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* that lyricist Ira Gershwin frequently quoted.¹ As the book musical matured throughout the twentieth century, the employment of such emotional pressure of words and music in a dramatic context became a craft. Songs started being conceived for specific spots in a musical play or a musical comedy and developed particular dramatic functions that, in turn, became conventions of the book musical. In this chapter I investigate the song types that resulted from those particular dramatic functions and their role in developing the action of sung-through musicals. Oscar Hammerstein II claimed, “There is in all art a fine balance between the benefits of confinement and the benefits of freedom. An artist who is too fond of freedom is likely to be obscure in his expression. One who is too much a slave to form is likely to cripple his substance.”² I demonstrate how the selected twelve American sung-through musicals have employed these song types both subscribing to musical theater song conventions and challenging the means though which the book musical employs these song types.

¹ Mark Steyn, *Broadway Babies Say Goodnight: Musicals Then and Now* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 61; also quoted in Ira Gershwin, *Lyrics on Several Occasions: A Selection of Stage and Screen Lyrics Written for Sundry Situations: and Now Arranged in Arbitrary Categories; to Which Have Been Added Many Informative Annotations and Disquisitions on Their Why and Wherefore, Their Whom-for, Their How; and Matters Associative* (New York: Knopf, 1959), x.

I employ the definitions assigned to musical theater songs based on their dramatic function. Drawing from scholarly works that define these functions (Stephen Banfield, Richard Kislan, Kim Kowalke, Engel Lehman, Scott McMillin, and Joseph Swain), I revisit the categories and their definitions to demonstrate this chapter’s thesis. Both the book musical and sung-through musical employ the same song types to dramatize a scene or to narrate it, so I conclude this chapter with a discussion on these song types’ endurance despite a change in the structure of musicals.

My analyses of the musicals selected for this study in addition to bibliographical research on musical theater scholarship revealed nine types of musical theater songs based on dramatic function: the “I am” song, the “I want” song, musical scene, reprise, story song, diegetic song, A-effect song, the 11-o’clock number, and the watershed number. These song types are not mutually exclusive and, similarly to aria types in eighteenth-century opera (such as the rage aria, the buffa aria, and the catalogue aria), they have become staples of the genre. Musical theater songwriters and book writers maneuver song content and presentation to fulfill or to thwart musical theater conventions. As John Platoff argues in his study of Mozart’s operas, “Particular kinds of musical numbers appear again and again, and any reasonably comprehensive understanding of [a] genre requires that we recognize these familiar patterns in text and music.”

---

3 Song types in musical theater can be based either on their musical characteristics or their dramatic function. Larry Stempel has demonstrated that these two categories emerged in the first half of the twentieth century and solidified with the musical plays of Rodgers and Hammerstein. (Larry Stempel, Showtime: A History of the Broadway Musical Theater [New York: W. W. Norton, 2010], 414). I focus solely on song types based on dramatic function. For a discussion on song types based on musical characteristics (such as the ballad, rhythm song, waltz songs, etc.), see Lehman Engel, The American Musical Theater, rev. ed. (New York: Mcmillan, 1975), 105–9; and Paul Laird, “Musical Styles and Song Conventions,” in The Oxford Handbook of the American Musical, ed. Raymond Knapp, Mitchell Morris, and Stacy Wolf (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 33–44.

4 For plot summaries of the twelve sung-through musicals in this study, see Appendix A.

Platoff also believes that “addressing the formal and stylistic procedures that served as [a composer’s] immediate context” reveals the level of constrain and originality of that composer in a particular genre.6

The “I am” song marks a moment usually early in the musical that specifies and furthers the characterization of the protagonist(s). The opening number and some spoken dialogue introduce this character and establish his or her personality and conflict, characterizing him or her implicitly as they show his or her behavior and interaction with other characters. The “I am” song makes the characterization explicit, allowing information to travel from inside the plot to the audience members through the protagonist’s interior monologue. The singing character uses the song to state “I can do something” or “I feel something.” Richard Kislan defines this type of song as one that “establishes something essential to audience understanding of character and situation. His examples comport with the definition proposed here: “Many a New Day” from Oklahoma!, “A Cockeyed Optimistic” from South Pacific, and “I Feel Pretty” from West Side Story. An early example of this song type is “I’m the Very Model of a Modern Major-General” from Gilbert and Sullivan’s The Pirates of Penzance. Examples in the musical theater repertoire include “I’m an Ordinary Man” from My Fair Lady, “I Enjoy Being a Girl” from Flower Drum Song, and “If I Were a Rich Man” from Fiddler on the Roof. “I am” songs may not always characterize the protagonist, but secondary characters as well, such as “Bring Me My Bride” in A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum and “Mister Cellophane” in Chicago. Also typical are “I am” songs that establish a character explicitly but through comments by other

---

characters instead of through interior monologue. Examples include “Maria” from *The Sound of Music* and “Belle” in *Beauty and the Beast*.

Some songs in the selected sung-through musicals fulfill the “I am” convention and feature such a song early in the score that introduces the protagonist through an interior monologue. Marvin sings “I Have a Family” to introduce himself to the audience in *In Trousers*. Caroline sings about her situation as a poor and struggling widow, mother, and maid in “I Got Four Kids” in *Caroline, or Change*. “Laundry Quintet” presents information about Caroline through comments of another character, in this case the washing machine. *The Human Comedy* focuses on the life of the Macaulay family, and the “I am” song in this musical considers the family as the protagonist. Kate Macaulay begins “We’re a Little Family,” and her children, Homer, Bess, and Ulysses soon join to explain who they are and their situation in the fictional town of Ithaca, California.

Because the dramatic action of a sung-through musical relies entirely on songs, “I am” songs may appear in later moments of the plot than the beginning to introduce a new character in the middle of the story. William Dumaresq and Galt MacDermot created “An Orphan I Am” and “I’ve Known a Lot of Guys” to introduce the characters Toby and Diana, respectively, in the second act of *The Human Comedy*. Trina’s “I’m Breaking Down,” as it appears in *Falsettos*, fulfills a similar purpose.7 “I’d Rather Go Sailing” in *A New Brain* introduces Roger and simultaneously contrasts him with the ever-agitated protagonist Gordon. Kate’s entrance song, “Look at Me Now,” in *The Wild Party* establishes her strong personality and murky past, after Queenie and Burr’s situation has been established. “He Was Calm,” in the same musical,

---

7 “I’m Breaking Down” was composed for *In Trousers*, but William Finn and James Lapine used it also in *March of the Falsettos* and *Falsettos*. I discuss the presence of this song in these three musicals in chapter 5.
introduces traits of Black’s personality through commentaries coming from Queenie and her party guests.

Some “I am” songs in sung-through musicals challenge the convention. These appear at the end of a musical and function as a moment for the protagonist to reflect and understand his or her identity after experiencing a journey. “The Bed Was Not My Own” in Hello Again reveal important aspects of the Senator’s personality and conflict, but as it occurs in the last scene of the musical, it mirrors and verbalizes the questions that all other characters had in the previous nine scenes. The duet “What You Own” towards the end of Rent features the protagonists Mark and Roger reflecting on past events and recent choices in order to come to terms with their identity as bohemians and aspirations as a film maker and musician, respectively. Whizzer’s solo “The Games I Play” marks his “I am” song. As it appears towards the end of March of the Falsettos, it breaks with tradition, revealing his personality just before the final curtain. However, as it appears in the double bill Falsettos (of which March of the Falsettos is the first act), the song occurs at the end of Act I and comports with tradition, introducing a character’s interior monologue that is expanded in the second act (Falsettoland).

Because of The Last Five Years’s structure, the two protagonists have their “I am” song each at opposite ends of the musical. As Jamie expresses his excitement for being both romantically and professionally successful in “Moving Too Fast” (Scene 4), he reveals aspects of his personality. He compares and distances himself from other people:

JAMIE  
Some people can’t get success with their art,  
Some people never feel love in their heart,  
Some people can’t tell the two things apart,  
But I keep rollin’ on.8

Cathy, who tells the same story as Jamie but in reverse chronological order, reaches her “I am” song in the antepenultimate scene. In the song “I Could Do Better Than That” she, too, compares herself to others and concludes that after considering the lives of other girls she knows, “I thought about what I wanted, it wasn’t like that at all . . . I can do better than that.” Jason Robert Brown’s structure for this musical challenges the conventions of the “I am” song. By the time “I Could Do Better Than That” occurs in the plot, the audience has already observed Cathy attempting to do better than other girls, but being divorced after a five-year marriage to Jamie.

The “I want” song establishes, or at least implies, a motivation and a course of action. In Kislan’s words, the singing characters “aspire beyond the position of what they established in the I am song.” The song allows the character (in most cases, the protagonist) to articulate his or her knowledge, awareness, or position in a given situation. It establishes what the character can and wants to do in order to change; it justifies his or her actions and decisions. Similar to the “I am” song, the “I want” song, too, tends to occur early in the plot. Kislan offers the following examples of “I want” songs: “The Simple Joys of Maidenhood” in Camelot and “Matchmaker” in Fiddler on the Roof. Other noteworthy “I want” songs include “I Jupiter, I Rex” from Cole Porter’s Out of this World, “Wouldn’t It Be Loverly?” from My Fair Lady, “Some People” from Gypsy, “Corner of the Sky” from Pippin, and “I Hope I Get It” from A Chorus Line.

In American sung-through musicals, some composers chose to place an “I want” song conventionally early in the plot to introduce the protagonist’s course of action. Roger in Rent expresses his wish to write one last song before he dies in “One Song Glory.” Queenie in The

---

9 Ibid., 53–54.

*Wild Party* desires an event to happen “Out of the Blue” to change her monotonous marriage, giving her the idea to throw a wild party. The first line of Caroline’s “I want song,” “Gonna Pass Me a Law,” in *Caroline, or Change* metaphorically foreshadows her reluctance to embrace change: “Gonna pass me a law that night last longer.”¹¹ She proceeds to wish her son back from Vietnam, her daughter to respect her, and Nat King Cole to “come over my house, come over every night and stroke my soul.”¹²

Marvin’s “I want” songs in the three Marvin musicals occur early on, too: “I Can’t Sleep” in *In Trousers*, “A Tight-Knit Family” in *March of the Falsettos*, and “About Time” in *Falsettoland*. The last one occurs in the middle of the opening number, “Falsettoland” and functions as a fragment of that number. Marvin interrupts the number to state that he wants to be a better man, father, and lover, essentially to be “as mature as my son, who is twelve and a half.”¹³ If we consider *March of the Falsettos* and *Falsettoland* in the context of the double-bill *Falsettos*, both acts present the protagonist’s motivation: to see his unconventional family live in harmony despite all its problems (in “A Tight-Knit Family”) and to have a mature relationship with Whizzer (in “About Time”). Marvin achieves both goals in the last two songs of *Falsettoland*, “Jason’s Bar Mitzvah” and “What Would I Do?”

Since the entire drama of a sung-through musical is communicated in song, “I want” songs appear in later parts of the plot and are assigned to characters other than the protagonist. “Mistress of the Senator” in scene 9 of *Hello Again* is the only “I want” song in the musical in

¹¹ Tony Kushner and Jeanine Tesori, *Caroline, or Change* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2004), 45.

¹² Ibid.

which the singing character expresses more than just sexual desire. The Actress uses the song to seduce the Senator, but also to declare: “I need a change of scenery, I need a new career. I need a new adventure, and I can’t wait another year.”\textsuperscript{14} “Old-Fashioned Love Story” (in the middle of Act I of \textit{The Wild Party}) enacts Madeleine’s sex hunt during the party. “I Hate the Bus” in Act II, Scene 8 of \textit{Caroline, or Change} discloses Emmie’s desire to have a better quality of life than her mother has had as a maid, for which Emmie has been fighting since her appearance in Act I, Scene 5.

Both protagonists in \textit{The Last Five Years} have two “I want” songs apiece. The differences in what each one wants for their life indicate that they strive for different purposes, which distance them and ultimately doom their relationship. Cathy’s “I want” songs concern her struggles as a musical theater actress and desire to succeed despite innumerable obstacles. She expresses this in “A Summer in Ohio” (Scene 7) and “Climbing Uphill” (Scene 10). Jamie’s “I want” songs occur after he and Cathy get married and focus on his difficulty in maintaining a monogamous relationship in “A Miracle Would Happen” (Scene 9) and “Nobody Needs to Know” (Scene 13). He tries to fight his desires and to convince himself that nothing is wrong, but realizes in the latter song that he needs a change.

Kislan argues that “the I am song responds to characters and situations; the I want song responds to plot.”\textsuperscript{15} However, these categories are not mutually exclusive. When a character expresses what he or she wants, aspects of his or her personality consequently often come to the fore. “How Marvin Eats His Breakfast” in \textit{In Trousers} shows what Marvin wants (his breakfast made and his demands heard), but the song establishes his spoiled and bossy behavior more than


\textsuperscript{15} Kislan, 228.
his desire to have eggs over toast. “Safe” in Hello Again also mixes the “I am” and “I want” types. The song’s A sections reveal facts about the Young Thing’s life, whereas in the bridge he sings about what he wants for his life. “Out Tonight” in Rent reveals that Mimi wants to go out and live life without worrying about the consequences and the future, which also characterizes her as epicurean and carefree. “Life of the Party” in The Wild Party furthers the characterization of Kate, while also revealing her ambition to seduce Burrs and “run the show until it’s time to go or till it’s time to kill.”16 As Kim Kowalke concludes in his study of musical theater song conventions, both the “I am” and “I want” songs “negotiate between [the characters’] exterior and interior selves, with the hidden, neglected aspects of personality.”17

A musical scene happens when an entire dramatic action occurs through music. Lehman Engel described this song type as one that explores some action that the book lacks and takes the dramatic action from one point to another.18 He provides three examples of a musical scene: “The Quintet” and the songs “A Boy Like That” and “I Have a Love” in West Side Story. Neither Kislan nor Kowalke discount the presence of spoken dialogue in a musical scene. On the contrary, both believe that the quick transition between spoken and sung lines in a song characterizes it as musical scene. Kislan cites two songs from Carousel, “If I Loved You” and “When the Children Are Asleep,” both of which flow with “no break in the direction of the drama” from dialogue to song, including “melodies, monologue, dialogue, and musical interludes.”19 Kowalke argues that in musical scenes from musical comedies of the Golden Age

18 Lehman Engel, The American Musical Theater, 200.
19 Kislan, 225.
“speaking spilled over into singing, singing into speaking, or dancing into both.”

Scott McMillin, who also discusses the bench scene from *Carousel* in addition to “The Surrey with Fringe on Top” from *Oklahoma!*, argues that these numbers embody the true notion of integration, since the song does not expand information from the book, but develops its own action. Jerry Bock and Sheldon Harnick created archetypal musical scenes in their musicals, such as “Good Morning, Good Day” in *She Loves Me* and “Sons” in *The Rothschilds*. Stephen Sondheim mastered the form, developing dramatic action of some of his musicals with songs that switch quickly between sung and spoken lines (“Simple” in *Anyone Can Whistle* and “Prologue: Into the Woods” in *Into the Woods*).

Musical scenes may also occur through sung dialogue alone. The characters do not need to resort to spoken lines in the middle of a song to make it a musical scene. If the song develops dramatic action with content and information that the book has not developed and the characters sing all of their lines in a sung dialogue, this too can qualify as a musical scene. Harnick and Bock created such numbers, as “Little Tin Box” from *Fiorello!* and “Do You Love Me?” from *Fiddler on the Roof*. Sondheim, too, employed the form in his musicals, such as “Barcelona” in *Company*, “A Weekend in the Country” in *A Little Night Music*, and “Opening Doors” in *Merrily We Roll Along*.

In all examples above, a substantial amount of spoken dialogue precedes the break into song. A musical scene in a book musical does not literally comprise the entire scene. In sung-through musicals, a musical scene may constitute an entire scene; therefore, this type of song occurs more frequently in sung-through musicals that in book musicals. Because the sung-

---

20 Kowalke, 173.

through musical develops in song alone and each song has to have considerable amount of drama and information about the characters and their situations, many songs in a sung-through musical fit the category of musical scene. Some follow the Rodgers and Hammerstein model of transitioning between an actual song and short passages of spoken dialogue or monologue. This happens in *Wings* (“I’ll Come Back to That”); *Rent* (“You’ll See,” “Tango: Maureen,” and “La Vie Bohème”); *A New Brain* (“Calamari,” “Roger Arrives,” and “In the Middle of the Room”); and *The Wild Party* (“The Apartment,” “Raise the Roof,” “He Was Calm,” and the Act I finale, featuring “Maybe I like It This Way” and “What Is It About Her?”). *Caroline, or Change* is structured basically with musical scene numbers. Examples include “Dotty and Caroline,” “Stuart and Noah,” “Rose Recovers,” “The Chanukah Party,” and Act 2, Scene 10, “Aftermath,” which is literally a musical scene, since its music is continuous, and not divided into songs.

Some other musical scenes in the selected sung-through musicals occur solely through sung dialogue. In the Marvin musicals, William Finn divides musical scenes into sections and has a character announcing the beginning of a new section. “The Rape of Miss Goldberg” in *In Trousers*, which depicts Marvin’s spoiled behavior while in high school, is divided into eights scenes cued by the Sweetheart. As the scenes progress, Marvin becomes more audacious towards his teacher, Miss Goldberg, until “Marvin gets the things he wants.” In *March of the Falsettos*, Whizzer announces the song “Marvin at the Psychiatrist” as “a three-part mini opera.” Like the Sweetheart in “The Rape of Miss Goldberg,” Whizzer cues the changes from one part to another. In the first part, Marvin and his psychiatrist discuss Whizzer, in the second part Trina, and in the

22 Finn, *The Marvin Songs*, 45.

23 Ibid., 113.
third Marvin’s son, Jason. In both “The Rape of Miss Goldberg” and “Marvin at the Psychiatrist,” each section has different music, contrasting with the preceding one.

With the exception of “The Next Ten Minutes,” all of the songs in *The Last Five Years* are solos. However, Brown specifies that the addressee in some songs is present in the scene and hears the song’s content, turning monologue songs into musical scenes. In “See I’m Smiling” (Scene 3), Cathy tries to show to Jamie that she has put more effort into the relationship than he has. Cathy sings the song “sitting at the end of a pier by the river in Ohio—Jamie has come, somewhat unexpectedly, for a visit.”²⁴ In “If I Didn’t Believe in You” (Scene 11), Jamie tries to explain to Cathy that he has always believed that she could succeed professionally, and she cannot blame her failure on his success. Cathy is present in the scene, since the song begins “in the middle of a fierce fight with Cathy.”²⁵ Although Brown provides just one side of the dialogue in each song, both songs form compelling musical scenes, which develop the dramatic action and depict the final year of Jamie and Cathy’s marriage.

A reprise consists of an abbreviated repetition of a song in a later moment in the plot than the first instance of that song. It occurs after intervening events, action, and characterization have developed the plot considerably, giving the repetition of a song a new context and, often, a new meaning. Kislan argues that reprises “add something and not merely repeat . . . [it] should be brief . . . [and] lyrics may or may not change.”²⁶ A dramatically effective reprise occurs in *South Pacific*, when Nellie reprises a short passage from Emile’s “Some Enchanted Evening.” Believing that he has died and realizing her prejudice toward his two Eurasian children, she

²⁴ Brown, 11.
²⁵ Ibid., 49.
²⁶ Kislan, 226.
reprises his music and lyrics to lament that she allowed herself to lose the love of her life.\textsuperscript{27} In *The Sound of Music*, the Act I song “Sixteen Going On Seventeen” reappears abbreviated and with new lyrics in Act II. In its first iteration, Liesl sang the duet with Rolf, who convinced her that she was old enough to be in a relationship. In the reprise, Liesl sings with Maria, who teaches her about love, predicts that she will be married in the future, but cautions that she should wait to do so until she falls in love.

In his book *The American Musical Theater*, Engel concluded that reprises went out of style in the 1970s, and cites Sondheim’s *A Little Night Music* and the scores of rock musicals.\textsuperscript{28} However, the technique never completely disappeared, and the American sung-through musical has developed innovative usages of the reprise when the entire dramatic action is communicated in song. For example, Trina does not finish her solo “Holding to the Ground” in *Falsettoland* in its first iteration. The song is interrupted by Whizzer in the hospital, cuing “Days Like This I Almost Believe in God.” Finn added a reprise of “Holding to the Ground” at the very end of the following song, “Canceling the Bar Mitzvah,” when Trina and Mendel conclude Trina’s song. Also in *Falsettoland*, Finn created Jason’s “Another Miracle of Judaism” as a contrafacta of “Miracle of Judaism,” from earlier in the musical, functioning as a reprise, although Finn does not use this term. In “Miracle of Judaism,” Jason asks God to help him decide which girl to invite to his bar mitzvah; in “Another Miracle of Judaism,” he prays for Whizzer’s recovery. Jason’s two solo numbers address the two principal topics of *Falsettoland*: the bar mitzvah and Whizzer’s HIV status. Both “Hello Again” in *Hello Again* and “Queenie Was a Blonde” in *The

\textsuperscript{27} For a discussion of this reprise, see Alexandre Bâidue, “Comedy Tomorrow, Tragedy Tonight: Defining the Aesthetics of Tragedy on Broadway” (MM thesis, University of Cincinnati, 2012), 134–35.

\textsuperscript{28} Engel, 122.
Wild Party open their respective musical. Michael John LaChiusa and Andrew Lippa employ the reprise technique at the very end of these musicals, providing a cyclic close to their scores.

In The Human Comedy, Dumaresq and MacDermot’s song reprises relate to different characters than those to whom the songs did in their first iteration. In Act I Kate and Bess teach important lessons to the young and ever inquisitive Ulysses: they explain death in “Death is Not an Easy Thing,” human’s place in nature in “The Birds in the Sky,” and the importance of sharing and forgiving in “Remember Always to Give.” Reprises of these songs return later in the plot, as the characters endure different challenges in their lives. After Spangler survives a robbery at gun point, giving the money to the robber even after he decided not to take it, the chorus intervenes and reprises Kate’s “Remember Always to Give,” beginning with the line “if you give to a thief, he can’t steal from you, and he’s then no longer a thief.” 29 This reprise has the same melody and lyrics, but MacDermot lowered the key a major third and arranged it in four-part harmony. When in Act II the chorus sings that Homer continues to deliver telegrams that inform locals that a loved one has died in action, Kate reprises “Death Is Not an Easy Thing,” using the same music, but altering the lyrics to a non-specific addresse. The song that she used to explain death to Ulysses becomes a message reminding that everyone must cope with death “no more in war than peace.” 30 Her teaching Ulysses that dead ones remain alive because we are alive addresses the audience directly when the chorus sings the song’s final line, “they live on in you.” 31 Finally, Spangler and Diana reprise Bess’s “The Birds in the Sky” to depict their happiness together. 32


30 Ibid., 80.

31 Ibid.

32 I discuss this reprise in chapter 4.
*Rent* features a reprise that turns a happy song into a poignant one, not unlike “Some Enchanted Evening” in *South Pacific*. Jonathan Larson used a reprise of Collins and Angel’s love duet “I’ll Cover You” for Angel’s funeral. The reprise, in a slower tempo than the original and with reduced texture in the accompaniment, becomes Collins’s eulogy for Angel. Larson also juxtaposed the chorus of “Seasons of Love” towards the end of that reprise, reminding the characters and the audience of that song’s message: we can use love to measure a year in our lives.

Finn employed a reprise of “Heart and Music” in *A New Brain*, but altered the lyrics, the form, and even the title. “Heart and Music,” a song in ABCB form, functions as a prologue to Gordon’s time at the hospital. “Time and Music” occurs as the antepenultimate song in the musical, and the new title reflects Gordon’s understanding that the life-threatening surgery made him appreciate the passage of time more than ever before. Finn shortened the reprise to AB form. In both “Heart and Music” and “Time and Music,” all characters come to the stage, the doctor and nurses, Gordon’s family and friends, and even the homeless lady. The songs thus depict Gordon’s subconscious coming to life as he first realizes his conflict and later as he come to terms with it. In addition, the reprise of Roger’s “I’d Rather Go Sailing” by Gordon towards the end of *A New Brain* functions as another contrafacta. By singing it after the coma, Gordon appears to have changed and assimilated Roger’s stress-free philosophy. He uses the same music as Roger did previously in the musical, but in a shorter passage and with new lyrics. He turns Roger’s “I’d rather be sailing” into “I feel like I’m sailing” and concludes that with such feeling he is “slowly exhaling, holding on for life.”

---

On one hand, a reprise in a sung-through musical may have the same dramatic function that it does in book musical: adding a new idea or dimension to a situation or feeling established previously in the drama. On the other hand, if the number of songs and amount of singing is greater in a sung-through musical than a book musical, a reprise responds to a dramatic situation developed in another song, not in a scene with dialogue. The reprise of “Holding to the Ground” in *Falsettoland* occurs as a reaction to Jason’s behavior in “Canceling the Bar Mitzvah,” and “Another Miracle of Judaism” marks Jason’s own response to the events dramatized in “Canceling the Bar Mitzvah.” Similarly, the reprise of “Remember Always to Give” in *The Human Comedy* develops seemingly from “Give Me the Money” and “You Coming Here Now,” the reprise of “Hello Again” from “The Bed Was Not My Own,” “Time and Music” in a *New Brain* from “Time,” and “Queenie Was a Blond” from “How Did We Come to This?” Larson adds the chorus of “Seasons of Love” to the reprise of “I’ll Cover You” in *Rent* to transmit one of the most touching messages of the musical. Reprises in sung-through musical depend on a partnership with other songs: an interplay between characters acting out a scene and reacting to its events, all in song.

Story songs present a short story fit into a song form. The Aristotelian notion of beginning, middle, and ending as the structure of storytelling is accommodated to fit standard song forms (AABA, verse-refrain, etc). In musical theater, these songs help a character inform the audience about his or her past or situation, acquiring similar functions to an “I am” song, as it happens in “The Story of Lucy and Jesse” from *Follies* and “Nothing” from *A Chorus Line*. Story songs may be a means for a character to tell a story within the musical’s narrative, as “Melisande” in *110 in the Shade*. However, story songs may also occur to make a comment on the story that the musical tells (“Pirate Jenny” in *The Threepenny Opera*) or to enact a dream
(“The Saga of Jenny” in *Lady in the Dark* and “Tevye’s Dream” in *Fiddler on the Roof*). Story songs are rooted in folk ballads that told gruesome stories (“Barbara Allen”) or humorous ones (as “The Farmer’s Curst Wife”). Story songs have also found their way into popular music, such as the Beatles’ “Rocky Raccoon,” Wayne Cochran’s “Last Kiss,” Joni Mitchell’s “The Last Time I Saw Richard,” Christine Levin’s “Shopping Cart of Love,” and Eminen’s epistolary song “Stan.”

In the absence of a book with dialogue that could provide additional information about a character, a story song in a sung-through musical develops the dramatic action more actively than in a book musical, where it would respond to something having been first established in a book scene. The story narrated in a story song may be the only means the creative team offers to reveal a character’s past: “And They’re Off” in *A New Brain* fills in information about Gordon’s parents and upbringing, and “1943” in *Caroline, or Change* details important events of the protagonist’s life between 1943 and the musical’s “present” (1963). A story song may be the only means to reveal traits of the singing character’s personality, which happens in Angel’s “Today 4 U” in *Rent*. “The Schmuel Song” is not the only song in *The Last Five Years* that reveals Jamie’s personality, but it portrays him as a caring boyfriend as he delivers an important message to Cathy. Singing a story song may be the only means also to reveal a character’s desires, such as the Young Wife’s “Tom” in *Hello Again*, and the story of “Roosevelt Petrucius Coleslaw” in *Caroline, or Change*, which depicts the children’s fantasies when they are given some money. These songs form the epitome of Sondheim’s “playlets which are called songs.”

---

Diegetic songs, following the theory derived from film music, occur within the narrative (the “diegisis”) of a musical. The character is fully aware that he or she is singing and being accompanied by a band or orchestra.\textsuperscript{35} Joseph Swain labels these prop songs and defines the type as “one which is sung because the character finds himself in a situation which demands or accommodates singing. . . . These songs are part of the scenery like props, quite distinct from songs which are expressions of a character’s emotions.”\textsuperscript{36} He chooses Charles K. Harris’s “After the Ball” in Jerome Kern and Hammerstein II’s \textit{Show Boat} and “A Bushel and a Peck” in \textit{Guys and Dolls} as representative examples. Stephen Banfield, focusing on Sondheim’s \textit{Follies}, proposes that in diegetic songs “not just the singing of the song but the recognition of musical and lyric style actually becomes an issue in the plot.”\textsuperscript{37} McMillin demonstrates how much the issue of integration depends on diegetic song in his consideration of “Can’t Help Lovin’ Dat Man” from \textit{Show Boat}.\textsuperscript{38} Other famous examples of diegetic songs include “Oh, What a Beautiful Morning” from \textit{Oklahoma!} and “Edelweiss” from \textit{The Sound of Music}. Musicals like \textit{Kiss Me, Kate}, \textit{Cabaret}, and \textit{Chicago} play with the ambiguity derived from how much a diegetic song can inform about the character who sings it, and contrary to Swain’s definition, express his

\textsuperscript{35} Carolyn Abbate makes a distinction between phenomenal versus noumenal music in opera in lieu of diegetic and non-diegetic music. When she discusses the “Bell Song” from Delibes’ \textit{Lakme}, she notes, “The scene involves ‘phenomenal’ performance, which might be loosely defined as a musical or vocal performance that declares itself openly, singer that is heard by its singer, the auditors on stage, and understood as ‘music that they (too) hear’ by us, the theater audience” (Carolyn Abbate, \textit{Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century} [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991], 5). According to Jeongwon Joe, Claudia Gorbman prefers Abbate’s terminology in the discussion of dramatic/theatrical arts because of its roots on Book III of Plato’s \textit{Republic}, in which he compares “diegesis” in narrative art to “mimesis” in dramatic art (Jeongwon Joe, \textit{Opera as Soundtrack} [Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013], 80–81).


\textsuperscript{38} McMillin, 102–9.
or her emotions. “I Hate Men,” “Don’t Tell Mama,” and “All That Jazz,” respectively, occur
diegetically and reveal the singing character’s opinions and personality.

Diegetic songs have a different function in sung-through musicals. Since all characters
break into song throughout the entire plot, a diegetic song becomes a way of introducing some
variety to the purpose of singing. In The Human Comedy, the characters break into several
diegetic songs. Homer gets his job at Spangler’s telegraph office because he sings (“Happy
Birthday” and “Anniversary Song”). Homer is so successful that his co-worker, Mr. Grogan,
later asks him to sing again (“When I Am Lost”). The boys at the war front find singing a form
of pastime and comfort (“How I Love” and “Everlasting”). In Lippa’s The Wild Party, the song
“A Wild, Wild Party” occurs diegetically in the middle of Act I. Phil and Oscar suggest that
everyone in the party join in this reverie to break the ice after a fight between Kate and Nadine.
The song recounts the myth of Adam and Eve (played respectively by the protagonists Burrs and
Queenie) and draws parallels between the supposedly rowdy and unrestrained behavior that they
had in Eden and that of the guests at the party.

In Rent Maureen is a performance artist and the song “Over the Moon” is a diegetic
number. Based on the English nursery rhyme “Hey Diddle Diddle” and the children’s book
Harold and the Purple Crayon, Maureen uses the song to mock Benny and the gentrification that
he has brought to the East Village and the life of local bohemians. In his early scripts, Larson
made Maureen a performance artist who follows the steps of famous performance artists such as
Laurie Anderson and Diamanda Galas.39 In a character description for Maureen, Larson specified

---

39 Performance art derived from unconventional theatrical pieces staged by Laurie Anderson and Yoko Ono
in the 1960s and 1970s in New York City. By the 1980s, the movement was extremely popular and several venues
throughout the city presented performance artists who used their performances to question art, fashion, politics, and
advocate for feminism. Michael Greif, director of Rent, suggested to Larson that a performance artist (Holly
Hughes) be hired to write Maureen’s number, but Larson refused. (Evelyn McDonnell and Kathy Silberger, Rent by
theater, see Woodrow Hood, “From Revolution to Revelation: Women Performance Artists and the Transformation

that she became an activist who speaks up against injustice after she came out as a lesbian and learned that she was HIV positive. “Over the Moon” was composed in 1992, but Larson subsequently made several changes to the number. In the 1994 workshop, the actress playing Maureen, Sarah Knowlton, played a cello during the performance. When Idina Menzel was cast in 1995, Larson altered what was spoken and what was sung to fit her voice. This is the only entirely diegetic song in Rent. Roger’s “Your Eyes” starts diegetically when he sings it to a dying Mimi. However, as the song progresses, he questions the situation and quotes a non-diegetic song from the musical (“I Should Tell You”), while the band takes over the accompaniment. Thus, the song occupies an ambiguous space between diegetic and non-diegetic.

A-effect songs fulfill the dramatic purpose of alienation that Bertolt Brecht stipulated as particular to Epic Theater. Aiming for a form of theater that encouraged audience members to engage critically with the play, as opposed to just being entertained or moved by it, Brecht developed a technique that “hindered [an audience] from simply identifying itself with the characters in the play.” In performance, actors alienate instead of impersonate characters,
quoting or demonstrating the character’s behavior, but not identifying with it. The A-effect is opposite to Aristotelian catharsis and Stanislavsky’s methods of naturalistic acting in order to sacrifice and break the effect of illusion. Consequently, emotions, instincts, and impulses become critical in a conscious level, while traditionally in Western theater they operate in a sub-conscious level. This consciousness alienates the spectators, who distance themselves from the action, and are free to reflect, to compare, and to evaluate what they see and hear. As Stephen Hilton has claimed, “Willful disruption of the illusion of dramatic unity and socially critical didacticism are two faces of the same epic coin.”

A-effect songs in musical theater achieve this function by performing some of the tenets of Verfremdungseffekte. First, the actor dismisses the fourth wall and “expresses his awareness of being watched.” This makes the audience self-aware, no longer experiencing the illusion of being unseen spectators. Second, the actor and the song that s/he sings change the purpose of singing from representation to commentary. The character observes and comments on himself and/or the action or event happening onstage. This results in the actor distancing from the character, intermediating the character’s actions with the audience members’ role of witnesses. When singing a song, the actor undergoes a change of function and should point up breaking into song. Brecht concludes, “the actor must not only sing but show a man singing.”

———


should remind the audience members that they are in a theater, and the effect is enhanced if the sound source (even if it is an orchestra) be placed onstage, where it can be seen.⁴⁷

Some musicals depend entirely on these Brechtian attributes for their stories and Kurt Weill and Alan Jay Lerner’s *Love Life*, John Kander and Fred Ebb’s *Cabaret* and *Chicago*, and Sondheim’s *Company* and *Assassins* have brought Brecht’s Epic Theater to the tradition of American musical theater. The sung-through musicals selected for this study reveal that, similar to diegetic songs, A-effect songs play an important role in providing variety to the purpose of singing and the characters’ mode of expression when the entire dramatic action is sung. Finn employs this song type in all of the Marvin musicals. The three ladies in *In Trousers* act as a Greek chorus in some instances, singing songs that comment on Marvin’s life, as in “How the Body Falls Apart” and “I’m Wearing a Hat.” In *March of the Falsettos*, the four main male characters open the musical singing about their own spoiled behavior in “Four Jews in a Room Bitching.” Trina comments on her situation and gender role in “Trina’s Song,” and the men return to comment on the action by exposing the falsetto metaphor as a means to find one’s own voice while in search of his masculinity in “March of the Falsettos.” In other songs, characters break the fourth wall and sing short asides to the audience that help contextualize the situation that they are experiencing (this happens in “This Had Better Come to a Stop” and “Marvin Hits Trina”). *Falsettoland* opens with Mendel searching in the audience for people that may relate to the protagonists: “Homosexuals, women with children, short insomniacs, and a teeny, tiny band.”⁴⁸ Following Brecht’s method, Mendel makes the audience self-aware while introducing the story and even pointing out the sound source onstage.

---


⁴⁸ Finn, *The Marvin Songs*, 181.
The song “Sitting Watching Jason” in *Falsettoland* alters the purpose of constant singing in this sung-through musical because the characters sing not just to act out and narrate the action, but simultaneously to comment on it. The five adult characters are watching Jason play baseball. Marvin and Whizzer are no longer together, but Whizzer comes to the game at Jason’s request, which precipitates Marvin and Whizzer’s first meeting since their breakup. All of the action is acted out: the adults yelling for the team, Mendel cheering Jason, Marvin and Whizzer’s meeting, and Whizzer coaching Jason. However, the adults also narrate and mock the action that they are, in fact, acting out. They sing:

MARVIN, MENDEL, TRINA, CORDELIA, and DR. CHARLOTTE
We’re sitting and watching Jason play baseball.
We’re watching Jason play baseball.
We’re watching Jewish boys who cannot play baseball play baseball.

We’re sitting and watching Jason make errors,
The most pathetical errors.
We’re watching Jewish boys who almost read Latin,
Up battin’ and battin’ bad.”

The A-affect derives from the characters observing and commenting on Jason’s struggles in the field and their own situation as frustrated spectators. Finn’s lyrics allow the alienation effect to generate the comic effect of the song.

LaChiusa, too, created songs in *Hello Again* that fit the A-effect song category, switching between characters who act out a dramatic situation and those who comment on it. In scene 2 while the Soldier and the Nurse dance and kiss (during the dance break of the Soldier’s “I Got a Little Time”) the Actress, the Young Wife, the Young Thing, the Husband, and the Writer form a quintet that sing “We Kiss.” The song expresses the joy of being kissed and refers to the action

49 Ibid., 192–93.
that happens in all scenes of the musical, “we can kiss and then say goodbye.” This song reappears in Scene 5 as the bridge of the Young Wife’s song “Tom.” Scene 4 (the encounter between the College Boy and the Young Wife) takes place inside a movie theater. During “Story of My Life,” as the College Boy tries to concentrate, the patrons sing what goes on in his mind and reveal his struggles with impotence.

If “Over the Moon” brings variety to the sung-through structure of Rent by bringing diegetic singing, “Seasons of Love” contributes to the same purpose by being the only song that comments on the musical’s action. “Seasons of Love” opens the second act, and stage directions instruct that the company should sing it on a line “across the apron of the stage” facing the audience. They sing about how one can make the best of a year in his or her life. The song thus connects to the musical’s main action: the first act occurred all in one night, but the second act will show how these characters live in the following year. The song mentions “truths that she learned, times that he cried, bridges he burned, way that she died” as means to measure a year, and these all comment or, in some cases foreshadow, the action concerning Roger, Mimi, April, Mark, Collins, and Angel. Simultaneously, the use of genders “he” and “she” makes these sentences universal, reminding that everybody learns, cries, has bridges to cross, and dies. Finally, the song has a gospel upbeat that invites audiences to clap along during the chorus, alerting them that they are in a theater. Unlike Jessica Sternfeld’s claim that “Seasons of Love”

50 LaChiusa, 16.
51 Ibid., 30–36.
53 Ibid., 88.
has “no direct role in the story,”\textsuperscript{54} its functions as an A-effect song identifies several roles that this song acquires in a performance of Rent.

In The Human Comedy, The Wild Party, and Caroline, or Change, the alienation effect brings variety to the characters’ modes of expression not just through songs that fulfill such function, but also by characters whose entire responsibility in the plot is to intermediate between the internal action of the musical and the audience, narrating and commenting on the action in several songs. Dumaresq makes the chorus in The Human Comedy narrate and connect parts of the plot (as in “In a Little Town,” “Meanwhile,” and “Mary Arena”) and also comment on the action with songs that celebrate a message or moral from the story (“Beautiful Music” and “As the Poet Said”). In the The Wild Party, Lippa’s first two songs (“Queenie Was a Blonde” and “The Apartment”) feature the protagonists (Queenie and Burrs) introducing themselves in the third person with a chorus that helps them narrate the action. The chorus also exercises the function of Greek chorus as party guests, introducing other guests (“What a Party”), narrating the action (“By Now the Room Was Moving” and “The Fight”) and commenting on the main plot (“Who Is This Man?”).\textsuperscript{55}

Tony Kushner’s story in Caroline, or Change features anthropomorphic characters whose songs create the A-effect. The laundry machine, the dryer, and the radio in the basement all provide personal information about Caroline (such as “Sixteen Feet Beneath the Sea” and “Laundry Quintet”). They even help her deliver her I am song, “1943.” These objects and the moon comment on the action. In “Moon Change,” the moon emphasizes the point that Dotty

\textsuperscript{54} Jessica Sternfeld, The Megamusical (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 327.

\textsuperscript{55} In the 2015 revisal of The Wild Party for the New York City Center’s summer series Encores! Off-Center (July 15–18, 2015), Lippa eliminated all instances in which the characters refer to themselves in the third person. Lipa believes that “there is more humanity in the piece if they don’t do that. If they sing, it’s cold and distancing.” Andrew Lippa, interview by author, New York, NY, June 20, 2015.
made in “Dotty and Caroline,” namely, that change happens even if unpredictably. The radio (embodied by three female singers, in the manner of a doo-wop girl group) introduces Act II with “Santa Comin’ Caroline,” reminding Caroline and the audience of the action from Act I. The radio also comments on Caroline’s refusal to accept changes in “Salty Teardrops.” The washing machine comments on Caroline’s rage towards Rose in “Ooh Child.” In addition, human characters, too, break the fourth wall to narrate the action, as the Gellman grandparents do in “Rose Stopnick Can Cook” and Noah in “Roosevelt Petrucius Coleslaw.” These Brechtian touches in Caroline, or Change confirm Kushner’s two influences as a playwright: “Brechtian epic theater and American lyric realism. As he absorbed these inspirations and their theoretical underpinnings, Kushner utilized key aspects of both to enhance his own wholly original style.”

In book musicals, A-effect songs have appeared in a subgenre termed the “concept musical,” musicals whose plot is organized around a theme, and songs and scenes (usually in a non-linear order and divided into vignettes or episodes) keep referring to that theme. Ethan Mordden’s definition of the concept musical highlights the purpose of employing A-effect songs: “A presentational rather than strictly narrative work that employs out-of-story elements to comment upon and at times take part in the action.” Examples include Chicago (1975), A Chorus Line (1975), and Assassins (1990). The sung-through musicals in this study, however,

---


57 For more on the concept musical, see see bruce mcclung, Lady in the Dark: Biography of a Musical (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 154–66.

are not concept musicals. They all feature a clear and linear storyline (with the exception of In Trousers); they all present several themes that are developed in their plots, not just one that conceptualizes the entire musical; and the characters who sing A-effect songs do not come from “out of the story,” rather they are part of the story and often the scene in which an A-effect song occurs. The presence of A-effect songs in these sung-through musicals reveals the self-referentiality of these musicals, reminding the audience that they are in a theater and they have to suspend disbelief. This can be used for comic effect, as in “Sitting Watching Jason” in Falesettoland, or serious dramatic impact, as the chorus’s songs in The Human Comedy and the protagonists singing about themselves in The Wild Party.

The eleven o’clock number introduces a stirring song towards the end of the story, immediately preceding the denouement of the plot. The label “eleven o’clock number” originated when Broadway musicals started at 8:30 p.m., such number occurred at around 11:00 p.m. Kislan defines it as “the rousing number that stops the show at a point where it no longer needs to get started.” Kowalke uses similar explanation: “A high point near the end of the show. . . a rousing ensemble number that once again stops the show before the final denouement of the principal plot.” Both authors provide “Oklahoma” from Oklahoma! and “Sit Down, You’re Rocking the Boat” from Guys and Dolls as examples. Kowalke considers “Gee Officer Krupke” the eleven o’clock number in West Side Story. Other songs that befit the definition include “This Nearly Was Mine” in South Pacific, “I’m Going Back” in Bells Are Ringing, “Rose’s Turn” in Gypsy, “Brotherhood of Man” in How to Succeed in Business Without Really

59 Kislan, 228.
60 Kowalke, 172.
Trying, “So Long Dearie” in Hello Dolly, and “Cabaret” in Cabaret. Lady in the Dark is notable for its back to back eleven o’clock numbers: “Tschaikowsky” and “The Saga of Jenny.”

The sung-through musicals in this study have not taken much freedom with the conventions of the eleven o’clock number. Rather, they have enjoyed more the benefits of confinement and continued the tradition of this convention of the American musical theater. In four examples the eleven o’clock number allows the characters to ponder over the situation in which they find themselves having survived most part of their journey, marking a moment of revelation. In Falsettoland and Falsettos, the four homosexual characters (Marvin, Whizzer, Charlotte, and Cordelia) celebrate their friendship and bond in “Unlikely Lovers.” In a time period in which the LGBT community had been impacted by AIDS and prejudice, the song became Finn’s message that at least within that community one can find “friends that hover” with whom “be scared together” and “pretend that nothing is awful.”61 In Lippa’s The Wild Party, Queenie freezes the dramatic action with the ballad “How Did We Come to This?” to reflect on her choices when her lover kills her husband. Only after singing does she choose to leave the party, the prying eyes of her guests, and her lifestyle behind in search of something new.

In Rent, Roger’s song to Mimi, “Your Eyes,” marks the first and only time that he expresses his love for her. Throughout the plot, Roger is afraid to embark on a relationship, since he knows that the HIV virus can kill him anytime. Even after he learns that Mimi, too, is HIV positive, he does not express his love for her because of her drug addiction. In addition, he spends an entire year in search of a new song, one final legacy to leave behind after he dies. When Mimi is close to death, Roger sings “Your Eyes” to reveal the song that he has found and,

61 Finn, The Marvin Songs, 235–36.
through it, his true feelings to her. The song also marks a climax in the plot by quoting the main theme from Musetta’s waltz, “Quando me’n vo,” in a guitar solo as Roger, similar to Rodolfo in *La Bohème*, screams Mimi’s name. In *A New Brain*, the ballad “The Music Still Plays On” reveals Gordon’s concealed feelings toward his mother. Throughout the plot, their relationship seems to be close, but not amiable. In his coma, Gordon hallucinates and imagines the pain that his mother will feel if he does not survive his surgery. The song also reveals that Gordon regrets some of his mother’s life choices, such as being “married too young and divorced far too old.”

Eleven o’clock numbers may bring a moment of change and transformation in the singing character’s saga. In *The Human Comedy*, Homer has his break down in “I Don’t Know Who to Hate,” after learning that his brother Marcus died in the war and Mr. Grogan, too, died when he received this message in the telegraph office. The young boy’s frustration derives from understanding that tragedies happen and he does not have anyone to blame for the misfortunes. Learning to accept this marks Homer’s maturity in the plot of this musical. In *Wings* “Preparing for Flight” presents the protagonist, Emily, remembering the procedures that she had to go through as a young girl before performing the number in which she walked on wings of an airborne biplane. As a victim of a stroke, she struggles throughout the plot to remember information about her past. It is not until she hears the song that accompanied her show (“The New Daredevils of the Air”) that her memory rekindles and she can revive the experience of being a young aviatrix.

The song “Lot’s Wife” in *Caroline, or Change* brings Caroline to a crucial moment in her journey. It occurs after the two meanings of the word change have been explored in the plot: the changes that Noah leaves in his pocket, which led to a fight with the boy; and the social changes

---

in civil rights for African Americans, which Dotty and Emmy embrace, seems too close for Caroline to avoid. When Dotty tells Caroline that she must make a decision, either return to be the Gellman’s maid or pursue something different in her life, Caroline sings “Lot’s Wife.” She believes that, like the Biblical Lot’s wife, she is not strong enough to perform what she is asked: she cannot embrace changes in her life and just look forward, she needs to look back for survival, even if this means turning into a pillar of salt. This eleven o’clock number was not in Kushner’s initial script. When the show was in previews at the Public Theater, Tesori suggested a solo song for the protagonist to debate whether or not she should embrace changes, instead of simply showing her back at the Gellman’s at the very end.\(^\text{63}\) It was the number that both Tesori and Kushner struggled the most to complete.\(^\text{64}\) It entered the show without being orchestrated during previews, and they made several changes and incisions until opening night.\(^\text{65}\) Although Caroline uses this critical moment in the musical to remain a maid, hers is a noble choice because she accepts it so that her children can have a better future.

Finally, a song in a musical may function as a turning point or watershed in the development of the dramatic action. These songs delineate the architecture of the score and shift the perspective, focus, or path of the story. Mark Steyn argues that the song “You Did It” in My Fair Lady fulfills this purpose: it “is the moment in the drama when Lerner and Loewe shift the play’s point of view, and our sympathies, from Higgins to Eliza.”\(^\text{66}\) McMillin claims that “Luck Be a Lady” accomplishes a reversal in the plot of Guys and Dolls.\(^\text{67}\) In the sung-through musicals


\(^{64}\) Jeanine Tesori, interview by author, New York, NY, June 15, 2015.


\(^{66}\) Steyn, 96.

\(^{67}\) McMillin, 44–47.
of this study, the same dividing principle applies to “I’ll Cover You (reprise),” which enacts Angel’s funeral in Rent, and “Caroline and Noah Fight” in Caroline, or Change. These songs bring significant events for the protagonists to bare and shatter their relationship with those close to them before the denouement and the eleven o’clock number. However, because the structure of the sung through musical consists of songs alone forming the dramatic action, a song that acquires this watershed function becomes a pivot song: a central point in the song order in which the dramatic action shift perspectives and even its linearity. This occurs with “Out on the Wings” in Wings, “Tom” and “The Bed Was Not My Own” in Hello Again, and “The Next Ten Minutes” in The Last Five Years.

In Wings the song “Out on the Wings” bisects the one-act musical. The action before the song concerns Emily’s time at the hospital, recovering from the stroke and learning about her aphasia. The action that follows the song enacts her time in a rehabilitation center, where she interacts with other victims of aphasia and struggles with her speech disability. “Out on the Wings” portrays Emily having memory flashes concerning her past as an aviatrix who walked on wings, the first accurate recollection she has since the stroke. Moreover, this song marks the moment that, as composer Jeffrey Lunden points out, Emily “sings something and somebody else [Amy] understands what she was saying.”68 Up until this song, Emily’s singing depicted her thoughts and mind during her time in the hospital. Lunden also emphasizes the structural role of “Out on the Wings,” joking that “when she has the stroke and is at the hospital, she’s in an opera, and when she gets better, she is in a musical.”69 Lunden reuses and varies musical material of this song to create the last song of the musical, “Wings,” when Emily, despite

---

68 Jeffrey Lunden, interview by author, New York, NY, June 12, 2015.
69 Ibid.
improvements, has another stroke and dies imagining again to fly on wings. He explains that “Out on the Wing,” in E minor, marks her first full expression, and when it comes back at the end, he slightly altered the music and had her singing in the relative major key, G major, to transcend the power of expression of an aphasia victim.70

Hello Again consists of ten scenes, and scenes 5 and 10 delineate the architecture of the musical and the score. The Young Wife’s song “Tom” in the former marks a watershed moment in the development of the dramatic action. Scene 1 presents a sex act between the Whore and the Soldier. In the subsequent scenes, sex acts decrease and become increasingly more abstract. By the ninth and tenth scenes, no sex is acted out onstage. The song “Tom” signals the shift. The Young Wife sings it as she is having sex with the Husband, but “she substitutes a pillow for herself and leaves the bed and her Husband. She goes to the dressing mirror and meets her reflection (the Whore). She fantasizes.”71 Even if there is sex being acted out, the fact that the song is a fantasy about a strange man named Tom conspicuously contrasts with the explicit sex acts in the four previous scenes. As the Young Wife sees the Whore in her reflection in the mirror, the scene shifts the emphasis from the sex act to the psychological implications that sexual desire has for the Young Wife, a topic that becomes more apparent in the characters and scenes that follow Scene 5. LaChiusa concludes that the song “is meant to be there. It’s the fullest moment of the show, when you reach 5 of 10, and it’s the moment we start breaking all the reality of things.”72

70 Ibid.

71 LaChiusa, 43.

72 Michael John LaChiusa, interview by author, New York, NY, June 22, 2015. He credits the mirror idea to Graciela Daniele, director of the original production.
Scene 10 reaches the highest point in the abstraction described above. It does not enact a sexual encounter between the Whore and the Senator, but a conversation about the differences between love and sex, a topic that no other character tackled before, although it certainly permeated the previous scenes. The music that LaChiusa wrote for the Senator’s song “The Bed Was Not My Own” reflects how the last scene refers to and uses elements from the other nine:

Because each character meets a new character, and this new character meets another new character, the one thing about the play was that each person that you meet in your life, I feel since Schnitzler’s play [La Ronde], you take a bit of something from them, and they take a bit of something from you, so [in the musical] everybody builds on a piece of music from the other, so that by the end when the Senator sings “The Bed Was Not My Own,” it is actually an amalgam of everybody else’s songs. Each musical phrase derives from a previous song.73

Indeed, by the final song of the musical, not even the bed was not the Senator’s own; neither is the music that he sings to express his doubts and concerns related to love and sex.

“The Next Ten Minutes” in scene 8 of The Last Five Years mirrors the structure of the entire musical and shifts the path of both Jamie’s and Cathy’s narratives. As Jamie tells the story of the relationship in chronological order and Cathy in reverse chronological order, this song and scene is the only one in the musical in which their timelines intersect and they sing together about their engagement and wedding day.74 The song’s title parallels the title of the musical, but while the latter reviews the last five years, the former promises to focus solely on the next ten minutes, when Jamie proposes to Cathy. Similar to the structure of this musical’s book, the song starts with Jamie going forward in the action: from a date that they had on a boat in Central Park to the wedding day. At the climax of the song, they waltz together to the music that opens and closes the musical. As the song ends, Jamie leaves, and Cathy goes back from the wedding day

73 Ibid.

74 Brown, 34. Stage directions for this song indicate that when Jamie and Cathy are getting married, “they are standing at the altar together, looking directly at each other for the first time in the play.”
to the boat date. If one reads Jamie’s opening lines at the beginning and Cathy’s final lines at the end of the song, one finds the dialogue that they exchanged during the date when Jamie proposed. After “The Next Ten Minutes,” Jamie’s songs focus on the crisis in their relationship, whereas Cathy’s focus on the joys of their first years together.

Although the creators of American sung-through musicals found new forms and means to structure a story into a plot without spoken dialogue, distancing their works from the conventional book musical of the Golden Age, they continued to rely on the nine musical theater song types discussed above. Analyzing song as drama in these sung-through musicals raises the question of why these song types have remained stable, resistant, and enduring despite other changes in the genre of musical theater. I propose three reasons below.

First, these song types are dramatically effective and condense a significant amount of drama and information, enhancing and developing a musical’s dramatic action. The effectiveness of song types in music theater is similar to the categories of operatic arias. To quote John Platoff’s observations on arias types in eighteenth-century opera buffa, musical theater song types provide “a means to control dramatic pace.” Moreover, the dramatic information inherent in a song type help the creators of a musical not just humanize a character, but individualize him or her as well. Ronald J. Rabin argues that solo arias in eighteenth-century opera buffa achieve this, too, devising what he labels “individualized types”:

In depicting a character, the artist was obliged to express the essence of a type of human nature—in part because such a view of human character was in accordance with universal nature, in part because the artist would reflect the familiar and typical, both engaging the audience and ensuring the social relevance of the work. By creating the “individualized

type,” artists could simultaneously express what was common to the human experience while using their gifts to make the familiar and universal seem new and powerful.\textsuperscript{76} He demonstrates that “the rhetoric of the character allows for individualized expression within this essentially fixed structure.”\textsuperscript{77} Rabin’s argument and explanation may very well be applied to musical theater song types and their similar purposes.

Rabin’s argument points up another reason why these song types have been stable in the history of the American musical theater: they are flexible models. They do present some limits, but within these limits, a certain flexibility allows originality. Fulfilling, thwarting, or challenging what the song types can achieve grant them long life and usage in musical theater. They are not so different from sonata form, minuet, or rondo form in instrumental music. In fact, James Hepokosky and Warren Darcy indicate in the opening of their book \textit{Elements of Sonata Theory} that their goal in setting norms to study and analyze music under that theory is to “grasp the controlled flexibility on the implicit underlying system of conventions.”\textsuperscript{78} Maneuvering musical theater song types’ flexibility has resulted in a double attitude of preserving and innovating conventions that contributed to the development of the American musical theater.

Finally, the composers and lyricists considered in this study have employed the aesthetics of a tradition, in part, unconsciously. They reproduce and reinvent musical theater aesthetics because others used them successfully in the past. Thus, they acknowledge, showcase, and celebrate their contributions to the genre that those who came before them achieved. Consequently, the aesthetics and tradition of song types bring comfort and expectations to

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{77}] Ibid., 260.
\item[\textsuperscript{78}] James Hepokosky and Warren Darcy, \textit{Elements of Sonata Theory: Norms, Types, and Deformations in the Late Eighteenth-Century Sonata} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 11.
\end{itemize}
listeners, also unconsciously. John Graziano makes a similar point in his discussion on the 
endurance of the AABA song form in American popular music of the mid-twentieth century. The 
form succeeded and dominated because of the manner in which “the tonic is established and 
prolonged in an AABA form. With sixteen consecutive measures devoted to tonic emphasis, a 
composer can safely move away from it in the release . . . Hearing the repetition of a melody in a 
second A section, with essentially the same harmonies underlying it, allows the listener some 
comfort.”79

The song types in this chapter, too, provide comfort, expectation, familiarity, recognition, 
and acknowledgement that musical theater as a genre operates through conventions. As Richard 
Hasbany argues in his definition of genre: “The reader-viewer expects a certain pattern, and he 
may even tacitly demand such a pattern. He wants to see the icons, the characters, the conflicts 
and predictable resolutions he’s seen before. In a sense, he wants ritual, and genre pieces, 
especially in their earlier and naïve forms, come very close to being mythic rites.”80 Hasbany 
goes on to argue that studies on genre formation and identification must consider “the ritual 
nature of the repetition inherent in generic form and the peculiar mindset that may exist in the 
contemplation of these communal affirmations.”81 The use of song types guarantees the 
relevance of the selected sung-through musicals in the tradition of musical theater. Indeed, 
perhaps without them, the genre would be as shaky as a fiddler on the roof.

79 John Graziano, “Compositional Strategies in Popular Song Form of the Early Twentieth Century,” in A 
104.
81 Ibid.
PART II
Compositional Process
and the Song Order of Sung-Through Musicals
Chapter 4
How Changes Made to Songs’ Structure Affect Dramatic Action

The three previous chapters focused on the “final” or licensed versions of sung-through musicals. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 concern the compositional process of the same sung-through musicals before they reached their final or licensed versions. Similar to chapters 1 and 2, in chapters 4, 5, and 6, I consider songs the main unit of the dramatic action in sung-through musicals. In the absence of spoken dialogue, changes in the songs’ structure and placement in the plot are imperative to understand how the creators of these musicals devised compelling dramaturgy in sung-through or nearly sung-through scores. The changes reveal how they conceived and developed characterization and the progression and organization of the dramatic action through song alone. Collectively, these three chapters demonstrate how the process to create a sung-through musical (in both the song cycle and the embedded-song structure) enabled this form of musical theater to participate and extend the tradition of the American musical theater between 1979 and 2004.

The arguments in these three chapters are based on the history of the musicals and changes made to the songs during their compositional process. These changes may have been in the music, the lyrics, the songs’ placement and order in the plot, the character or characters who sing them, or their partnership with other songs to develop a portion of the plot. These chapters do not consider how the composer and lyricists first created their songs, but the changes made to them after they were conceived and plotted for the first time. This research draws on early versions of the musicals, including draft scripts, reading scripts, workshop scripts, and
production scripts. This research relies also on programs, newspaper clippings, personal interview with six of the composers, and videos of the original productions at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts’s Theater on Tape Department.

In this chapter I demonstrate how changes in the content of nine specific songs affected characterization and the development of dramatic action. These songs occupied the same spot in the sequence of song of their respective musical throughout the compositional process but considerable changes in their structure enhanced the means through which these sung-through scores communicate in song. The following two chapters focus on songs that were repositioned in the plot during the musicals’ compositional processes. I have divided the changes discussed in this chapter into four categories: songs that were expanded, songs that were curtailed, changes made to songs that enhanced subplot development, and songs that were assigned to different characters. I expand each of these categories below, using songs from the selected musicals to exemplify each type of change.

**Songs That Were Expanded**

Two songs in this study grew substantially during the compositional process of their respective musicals. The creators increased the number of characters who sing them and the amount of action that takes place during these songs, expanding characterization and

---

1 A reading script was used at a musical’s reading, i.e., the cast with scripts and scores in hand read the musical without any costumes, sets, or lighting. A workshop is a staged performance of a musical. Costumes, sets, lights, and even musical accompaniment are more modest than in a full production or may be excluded altogether. In either a reading or workshop, the work is unfinished, and the performance provides an opportunity for the creative team to adjust or rewrite parts of the work. A revival of a play or musical implies that the work has being revived in a new production with considerable amount of rewriting: a revival with revisions. Readings and workshops generally occur before the official opening of the work; a revival always happens afterwards. Finn’s In Trousers is the only musical in my research that was considerably revised after its first production and before the composer settled on a definite version. I consider the two revisals of the musical part of its compositional process because Finn considers the second revision (and third production of the musical) its definite, or final, version.
consolidating the development of the dramatic action in one song alone. This happened with “I Let Him Kiss Me Once” from The Human Comedy and the title song from Rent.

The action during “I Let Him Kiss Me Once,” in the middle of Act I, consists of Bess and Mary Arena singing the number diegetically. Before the music begins, “Bess is going through preset sheet music at her seat.”2 The girls dance and have fun as they perform this jitterbug in the living room. On the opposite side of the stage, Homer has to deliver a telegram to a Mexican woman, who upon receiving it gestures that she cannot read English and asks the boy to read for her. Homer reads that her son died in the war, and the woman cries desperately. The scene thus demonstrates that comedy and tragedy happen simultaneously. Homer, at the center of the scene, experiences a tragic moment while his sister dances at home completely oblivious to the effects of war. Homer matures as he understands the unpredictability with which comedy and tragedy can happen and the challenge to accept and balance both throughout life.

Revisions throughout 1983 brought significant changes to this song. The March 8, 1983 script of The Human Comedy features just Bess and Mary Arena’s part. Dumaresq describes the action as “Bess and Mary Arena appear at the piano singing a 1940s jive song, sung like the Andrews Sisters.”3 Homer’s action as the girls sing occurs in stage directions only, whose description makes the goal of the scene very clear. After Homer delivers the telegram to a Spanish (not Mexican) woman and she cries upon receiving the news, Homer “takes his leave . . . he rides off slowly, on the verge of tears, painfully trying to stifle his sobs. At last, still riding his bike, he bursts into tears. Music drowns his sobs out. Throughout the music of the light jive

---


number has blended with a slower, moving theme, which is in marked contrast, so that the irony
of joy and tragedy are interwoven musically." Bess and Mary Arena repeat the last stanza of the
song to bring it to an close.

In the reading script from October 21, 1983, the song has the same structure as it did in
the March script, but a manuscript annotation next to the last stanza indicates that the words
“killed in action, killed in action” are to be sung by the chorus, presumably simultaneous with
Bess and Mary Arena. These words come from Mr. Grogan’s muttering at the telegraph office
when he takes a message at the end of “When I Am Lost,” the song that precedes “I Let Him
Kiss Me Once” in both scripts.

The November 30, 1983 script features the song as it was performed at the December
28 opening and appears in the published book of the musical and original cast recording. Most of
what were stage directions for Homer in previous scripts has become primary text of the musical.
In this version, Bess and Mary Arena’s singing gives way to instrumental music that
accompanies Homer: he gives the telegram to a Mexican woman, she gestures that she is unable
to read it and gives it back to him. Homer sings the message to her: “your son was killed in
action, killed in action.” The Mexican woman now has the stage and sings her lament in
Spanish. The song culminates in an ensemble effect that combines Bess and Mary Arena
repeating the last stanza of the song, the men in the chorus echoing Homer’s words “killed in
action,” and the Mexican woman’s lament. The song juxtaposes diegetic and non-diegetic music.

4 Ibid., 17.

5 Galt MacDermot and William Dumaresq, Script Versions: The Human Comedy, version A, The New
York Shakespeare Festival Records, Series III, Box 3-165, folder 3, New York Public Library for the Performing
Arts, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York, 18.

York Shakespeare Festival Records, Series III, Box 3-165, folder 4, New York Public Library for the Performing
Arts, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York, 17.
Homer is still at the center, and this ensemble effect delivers the effect described in the March script: comedy and tragedy happening simultaneously in Homer’s life. However, this new and final version presents no stage directions detailing Homer’s reaction to the situation, creating room for an actor’s interpretation.

The song “Rent” occurs early in Act I of Rent and introduces some of the protagonists’ conflicts. Before the song begins, Benny, who used to be Mark and Roger’s friend and is now their landlord, goes back on his promise to allow them to live in his East Village loft for free and demands the rent. After Benny calls Roger and Mark, the electricity goes out in the loft, queuing the song “Rent.” Roger and Mark sing about frustrations with their bohemian lifestyle, burn posters and screenplays to keep warm, and make a pledge not to pay last year’s rent. Several other actions develop simultaneously: Joanne talks on the phone to Maureen, introducing their relationship; Collins sings about being mugged; and Benny talks on the phone to his wife complaining about Roger and Mark’s ingratitude. The number ultimately brings the company to the stage, highlighting that everyone in the bohemian community of the lower East Side share the protagonists’ values and concerns.7

Larson composed “Rent” for the very first draft of the musical in 1989, at a time when he was working with playwright Billy Aronson who had had the original idea of adapting Puccini’s La Bohème to the musical stage the year before. Aronson completed the first draft of Rent between July and September of 1989. Larson composed the music for three songs, “Rent,” “Santa Fe,” and “I Should Tell You” between September and December.8 They recorded the

7 Benny would definitely not sing the last words of the song, “We’re not gonna pay rent,” but the published script of Rent does not specify if he leaves the stage after singing “Draw a line in the sand, and then make a stand” (Jonathan Larson, Rent: The Complete Book and Lyrics of the Broadway Musical [New York: Applause, 1996], 12–13).

tracks so that they could perform their work to prospective producers. According to the receipts from the recording studio Nervous Music, “Rent” and “Santa Fe” were recorded on December 21, 1989; “I Should Tell You” on January 16, 1990. In a draft script dated September 22, 1989 the first scene opens with the song “Rent.” The script describes Mark as a painter and Ralph (not Roger) as playwright, both living in a messy apartment. They sing about their frustrations of not being able to create art while life demands them to find money and pay the rent. No other action interrupts their singing, and they worry about how to pay last month’s rent. Aronson’s lyrics employs the word “rent” both in the sense of a regular payment to a landlord and as the past participle of the verb to rend, which figuratively can mean to tear something (or someone) apart. Larson explained that this double meaning of the word marked the main reason why he and Aronson chose this title for the musical.

After Aronson dropped the project in 1991 and Larson continued working on it by himself, he kept “Rent” at the beginning of the dramatic action but made many changes to it and the action around it. In the July 1992 script, which Larson submitted to New York Theatre Workshop (NYTW) for consideration, he added more details to the description of the loft, changed Ralph’s named to Roger, made him a rock songwriter, and made Mark a videographer. The song remains the only action on stage, but it is now preceded by Roger’s playing the

---


11 Interview with Billy Aronson, quoted in McDonnell and Silberger, Rent by Jonathan Larson, 19.

12 Mimi and Mark are the only names that Larson kept from Aronson’s 1989 and 1990 drafts. The name Roger and other Anglicized versions of Puccini’s characters appear in a song list dated March 4, 1992 (Jonathan Larson Papers, box 11, folder 3). A previous song list from January 23, 1992 (box 11, folder 4) has the names in Italian. Based on these documents, Larson appears to have come up with the names Roger, Benny, Maureen, Joanne, and Angel between late January and early March of 1992.
Musetta’s waltz theme on his guitar, which Larson labeled the “Puccini theme.” He changed Mark’s ex-girlfriend’s name from Suzanne to Maureen and added Roger asking about her new lover’s name, to which Mark replies, “Joanne.” Larson also used this version of the song for the reading that took place at NYTW on June 17, 1993.14

In early 1994 Larson won the Richard Rodgers Development Award, which allowed him to produce a NYTW workshop of Rent. The workshop occurred from October 29 to November 6, 1994. In the intervening time Larson made extensive revisions to the script of Rent. Also, he participated in the NYTW summer retreat, which gave him additional time to work on the script. A new draft from July 1994 brought many changes to the musical’s structure. The song “Rent” no longer opens the musical but three voice-mail messages do. The first is by a guy named Dave to Roger, the second is Mark’s mother, and the third is Benny reminding them about the rent. “Rent” is no longer a continuous duet between Mark and Roger, although their parts are the same as in previous scripts. The song now alternates between them and other characters, similar to how it appears in the final version of the musical. After Roger and Mark sing “how we’re gonna pay rent” for the first time, three homeless people sing the theme of “Christmas Bells” while Angel “lightly taps out a beat on his ten-gallon plastic drum.”15 Collins enters and is beat up and mugged as Angel whistles to the tune of “Christmas Bells.” Excerpts of what in later scripts will become the song “You Okay Honey” follow to dramatize Angel helping Collins. The second part of “Rent” has Roger asking Mark about Maureen’s new lover, and both


Maureen and Joanne are spotlighted on stage as Mark refers to them. The action shifts to Maureen taking advantage of Joanne’s willingness to help with the preparations for Maureen’s protest performance. They sing an excerpt from the song “Female to Female,” which Larson included in the July 1992 script. The conclusion of “Rent” brings Mark and Roger back, and they finish the song alone as they had in previous versions.

In a draft dated September 1, 1994, Larson made Angel and Collins’ meeting scene interrupts the song later than it did in the July script. Larson no longer specifies what music accompanies Collins’s mugging. Larson interrupted Angel and Collin’s scene with Maureen and Joanne, who enter immediately after and exchange a brief dialogue about the stage where Maureen’s performance will take place and Maureen being mean to Joanne. The dramatic action cuts back to Angel and Collins before it segues back to the final part of “Rent.” The excerpt from “Female to Female” that appeared in the July script is omitted, and the dialogue for Maureen and Joanne was added. Larson used this version of “Rent” in the NYTW workshop.

In April of 1995, NYTW hired playwright Lynn Thompson to help Larson structure the musical. They worked together between May and October, and she encouraged Larson to rewrite his characters’ biographies in more detail than before and consider the plot from each character’s perspective. For the September 12, 1995 script, Larson completely rewrote the lyrics of “Rent,”

---

16 Ibid., 28.
17 I discuss this song in chapter 5.
20 McDonnell and Silberger, Rent by Jonathan Larson, 30.
eliminating Aronson’s original 1989 lyrics. Mark and Roger’s questions became more philosophical than the in previous lyrics and more attuned to their individual identities, with questions such as “how do you document real life when real life is getting more like fiction each day?,” “how do you write a song . . . when the notes are sour where is the power you once had to ignite the air?,” and “how can you connect in an age where strangers, landlords, lovers, your own blood cells betray?” Mark and Roger sing about how to pay last year’s rent, no longer last month’s. Larson kept the idea of breaking the song into sections, but he improved them. Collins calls Mark and Roger and tells them to join him in the café, they ask him to come over, but when he says that he will two hoodlums attack and mug Collins. Angel and Collin’s first meeting was moved to after “Rent” in a new song, “You Okay Honey?” Joanne enters and talks to Maureen on the phone, and Maureen is no longer present. Joanne tells Maureen not to call Mark to help them set the stage for her protest performance. Finally, a new dialogue between Benny and two new characters, Jan and Murget, explains that Benny’s father owns the loft where Mark and Roger live. All these sections come together at the end of the song, and the characters sing in counterpoint. The company joins Mark and Roger at the end, and the entire company end the song with the line “we’re not gonna pay rent, cause everything is rent.”

Rehearsals began on December 19, 1995, and the script with that date presents some additions to “Rent.” After Joanne’s call to Maureen, Larson entered a solo for Collins as he struggles to get off the floor after being mugged. He sings, “how do you stay on your feet when on every street it’s trick or treat, and tonight is trick.” Following this, Larson added lines for Mark and Roger wondering what happened to Collins after he called and they threw him the

---

loft’s key to get in. Benny calls Alison, his wife, to talk about Maureen’s protest. Larson cut the characters Jan and Murget and their dialogue with Benny.22

For the Off-Broadway opening, the song went through a few more changes, which brought it to its final version. Larson rewrote some of the lyrics. Mark and Roger, right after their opening stanzas, no longer sing, respectively, “we’re just like the masses” and “down on our asses.” Larson re-entered lines that Aronson had written in 1989 and which had been excised since the September 1995 script. Mark sings, “And we’re hungry and frozen,” to which Roger replies, “some life that we’ve chosen,” which is essential in their characterization early on in the musical. Larson shortened Joanne’s solo, eliminating her dialogue with a homeless man in the middle of her call to Maureen. Benny’s call to Allison has a new second stanza, and he no longer refers to Maureen but to how he can help Roger and Mark in the long run. Larson’s multi-part final version of “Rent” both distances the musical from the plot of La Bohème and functions as an opening number.

The processes to finalize “I Let Him Kiss Me Once” and “Rent” demonstrate the amount of dramatic action that the creators have to accomplish in one song when the entire dramatic action is presented and communicated in song alone. The rewritings transformed these two songs from duets into ensemble numbers, introducing additional characters and advancing the drama over the course of a song.

**Songs That Were Curtailed**

Three songs in this study had both their musical and textual content curtailed during the compositional processes of their respective musicals. The composers of these songs chose to

---

reduce them in order to quicken the pace and development of the dramatic action. This happened during the composition of “How Long Have I Been Here and Wrapped in the Dark?” from *Wings*, “Silent Movie” from *Hello Again*, and “I Should Tell You” from *Rent*.

“How Long Have I Been Here and Wrapped in the Dark?” was the first song created for *Wings*, and it sparked the idea of structuring the score with musical fragments. After Arthur Pearlman suggested the idea of adapting Arthur Kopit’s play *Wings* into a musical, composer Jeffrey Lunden believed that the play was not “something that wants to sing at all.” Pearlman consulted Kopit’s play and adapted the original words for the scene of Emily’s awakening after the stroke, in which after a long silence, she asks: “How long have I been here…and wrapped in the dark? Can remember nothing.” Lunden used this lyric sketch as a test run to see “if there was music in there.” He recalled, “We started working on this thing [the lyrics sketch], and it became really clear to us really quickly that yes, *Wings* can be sung and that no, this was not the way that it should be sung because there was a very coherent lyric for a part in the play that really is incoherent, and it was sort of there that we talked about the idea of fragmenting and then the fragments cohere.”

The song “The New Daredevils of the Air” ended up being the song fragmented throughout the score of *Wings*. However, Pearlman and Lunden cut several lyrics from “How

---


24 Ibid.


26 Jeffrey Lunden, interview by author, New York, NY, June 12, 2015. Lunden considers this sketch “to be completely lost at this point.”

27 Ibid. The idea of fragmentation was also in Kopit’s original, but fragmentation of images and language, which depict Emily’s aphasia, not fragmentation of music. His stage directions read: “Nothing seen that is not a fragment. Every aspect of her world has been shattered” (Kopit, *Wings*, 14).
Long Have I Been Here and Wrapped in the Dark?” and integrated this shortened version into the song “Globbidge,” whose music consists of themes derived from “Daredevils of the Air.” The new song dramatizes Emily awak

The fragmentation of the themes from “The New Daredevils of the Air” and the lines by the doctor and nurses, among which Emily sings a reduced version of “How Long Have I Been Here And Wrapped in the Dark?,” create the incoherent state that characterizes Emily’s situation, which Pearlman and Lunden sought at the beginning of the compositional process.

Scene 8 in LaChiusa’s Hello Again marks an example of not only a song being shortened during the compositional process but an entire scene. “Silent Movie” dramatizes the sexual encounter between the Writer and the Actress in the 1920s. The scene develops as a silent movie


29 Kopit, 24.

30 Lunden and Pearlman, Wings, 4.

31 Ibid.
in which the Writer takes the Actress to a spa and tries to seduce her. He also wants her to play a part that he created especially for her: “An innocent, helpless waif.” She, however, wants to play “a sensual creature—a modern woman.” When he demands that she plays what he wants, she uses sex to persuade him otherwise. La Chiusa gives two options for how this scene should be played: “They pantomime the dialogue, which appear as surtitles—or a continued voice-over of the Writer who speaks both parts.” The music is continuous and reproduces excerpts from “Montage” and “The One I Love,” both from scene 7 (between the Writer and the Young Thing), in a ragged piano solo.

La Chiusa recalled that he wrote a total of twenty-three songs for scene 8 during the compositional process, and the actors playing the Writer (Malcolm Getts) and the Actress (Michele Paw) learned all of them. La Chiusa explains: “By the time you get to scene 8, the audience has understood the concept, they [the characters] are going to have sex and feel sad about it afterward. And you need to get to that penultimate scene, scene 9, and then the end. We were doing this [the musical] in one act, and I couldn’t waste time and get the audience ahead of it. So I had to figure out how get through [scene 8] as fast as possible.” He and director Graciela Daniele finally decided on the song “Do a Little Rewrite” for the entire scene. The Actress stars in the Writer’s new film, titled “The One I Love,” but she demands him to rewrite it in order to prove his love for her and that she is his muse. As he hesitates, she uses sex to

---

33 Ibid., 62.
34 Ibid., 60.
36 Ibid.
convinces him. The song’s opening featured the Writer singing music from “Montage,” and the main theme from “The One I Love” permeates the song, appearing in both accompaniment and vocal parts every time the characters refer to the film. This song was used in previews of Hello Again, starting on December 30, 1993.

From the beginning LaChiusa wanted scene 8 to consist of an actual silent movie to be filmed in advance and presented to the audience in lieu of a live performance. When Lincoln Center announced that a silent film would exceed the budget for the musical, LaChiusa started composing a scene that would act out a silent movie in pantomime with melodramatic music underneath (played by a piano solo) with surtitles. “Do A Little Rewrite” was cut in January of 1994, before the January 30 opening, and the scene drastically shortened to just over two minutes. The accompanying music was reduced to the references to the two songs from scene 7 (“Montage” and “The One I Love”) and a ragged version of the main theme from “Do a Little Rewrite.” This “was the very last thing that went into the show, in January 1994.”37 Since “Do a Little Rewrite” gives the actress playing the Actress more material to sing in the show than just “Silent Movie,” LaChiusa retained it as an option for subsequent productions of the musical.

“I Should Tell You” in Rent is Roger and Mimi’s love duet. Since both are HIV positive, they are afraid to start another relationship or to spread the virus. The song ends with both agreeing that they should try a serious relationship despite their HIV status. Billy Aronson included the lyrics for this song in his September 22, 1989 script. He positioned the song at the very end of the musical, just before Mimi’s death. In a draft from 1990, Aronson inserted “I Should Tell You” with some new lyrics in the scene when Ralph and Mimi meet.38 They use the

37 Ibid.
song to explain past relationships before kissing. The words “Here goes, here goes” at the end of the song, which in the previous script led to Mimi’s death, now leads to their first kiss and the conclusion of scene 1. Aronson did not cut “I Should Tell You” from the end of the musical. Rather, because of the insertion in scene 1, he turned the final song of the musical into a reprise.

After Aronson dropped the project, Larson moved “I Should Tell You” to the first act finale. He composed “La Vie Boheme” in early 1992 and inserted “I Should Tell You” immediately after so that he could contrast the bohemians’ celebration of their lifestyle with Roger and Mimi’s duet. “I Should Tell You” remained the Act I finale in all scripts between July 1992 and December 1995. Roger and Mimi sing the duet while the Life Support group meeting and the riot initiated by Maureen’s protest both occur upstage. The extensive rewritings that the musical went through after the reading in 1993, the fall workshop in 1994, and the help by Lynn Thomson in mid-1995 never affected the song’s position and function to bring the first act to a close.

Larson rewrote Aronson’s lyrics considerably in the interim. In the July 1992 script, Mimi and Roger no longer sing about past lovers but their insecurities regarding a new relationship. Larson penned the stanza “trusting desire, starting to learn, walking through fire without a burn” for both to sing together. He assigned Mimi’s line “clinging a shoulder, a leap begins” and Ralph’s lines “stinging and older asleep on pins,” both written by Aronson, for Mimi and Roger to sing together following the new stanza. These collectively became the climax of the duet. The lyrics were not altered again until the September 12, 1995 script, when Larson entered the lines that Roger and Mimi refer to the day they met. Mimi sings, “I should tell you I lost that vial on purpose just to get back in.” Roger replies, “I’d forgotten how to smile until your candle
burned my skin.”\textsuperscript{39} In the December 19, 1995, Larson changed Mimi’s line to “I should tell you I blew the candle out just to get back in.”\textsuperscript{40}

For the January 1, 1996 script, Larson divided “La Vie Bohème” into two parts and inserted a shortened version of “I Should Tell You” in between, a configuration that remained constant until the final version. The words “here goes, here goes” now lead to Roger and Mimi’s exiting the stage and seguing to a sung dialogue between Maureen and Joanne. The ending of “La Vie Bohème” brings the first act to a close. Larson cut several lines and stanzas that dated back from Aronson’s 1989 script, leaving mostly his own lines in which the characters refer to the day they met. This shortened version of the song bookended by “La Vie Bohème” became the Act I finale for the Off-Broadway opening and licensed version.\textsuperscript{41}

These three songs demonstrate that the compositional process of a musical may result in curtailing a song’s content, reaching a concise version of the initial idea, while maintaining the same dramatic essence. The incorporation of a shortened version of a song into the frame of another song or scene reveals the process of creating a musical in the embedded-song structure. Lunden, LaChuisa, and Larson followed architect Mies van der Rohe’s dictum and one of Stephen Sondheim’s mottos for musical theater songwriting: less is more.\textsuperscript{42}


\textsuperscript{41} Larson also used the main motive from “I Should Tell You” as a leitmotif for Roger and Mimi, occurring in the middle of the songs “Another Day,” “Christmas Bells,” the intro to “Without You,” and in the Act II finale (all composed in 1992).

Changes that Enhanced Subplot Development

The dramatic action of subplots often communicates information about secondary characters that may intensify, contrast, or parallel the main plot. The absence (or near absence) of spoken dialogue in sung-through musicals leaves such responsibility to songs alone. In this section, I discuss how during the compositional process the creative teams improved the development of subplots by making changes to specific songs. The compositional process of Spangler and Diana’s “I’ve Known a Lot of Guys (reprise)” from The Human Comedy and “Emmie’s Dream,” the epilogue in Caroline, or Change, inform how Dumaresq and MacDermot, and Kushner and Tesori tackled such challenges.

Diana’s “I am” song, “I’ve Known a Lot of Guys,” occurs shortly after her first entrance in the middle of Act II of The Human Comedy. She stops by Spangler’s telegraph office to make sure that he will come for dinner that evening with her family. Ulysses is there waiting for Homer, and when Diana meets the boy, she explains to him that she met other men before Spangler who offered her everything she wanted, but Spangler has been the only one who made her fall in love. Later in Act II, as a contrast to Homer’s tragedy (the loss of his brother and Mr. Grogan), Spangler and Diana appear enjoying a beautiful day together. They reprise Bess’s “The Birds in the Sky” (from Act I), but halfway through it, Diana starts echoing the line “it’s Spangler that I love” from “I’ve Known a Lot of Guys” until she turns the reprise of the former song into a reprise of the latter.

Changes made to “I’ve Known a Lot of Guys (reprise)” in the various scripts from 1983 and 1984 reveal how Dumaresq and MacDermot strengthened the relationship between the main plot and subplot during the musical’s compositional process. In the March 8, 1983 script, Diana sings the reprise of “I’ve Known a Lot of Guys” to Spangler, confirming her love to him. In the
reading script (October 23, 1983) and the November 30, 1983 script, Spangler’s name appears below Diana’s, but the lyrics match the March script. According to Dan Dietz, both Diana and Spangler sang this number during the Off-Broadway run. The change, however, does not appear until the March 7, 1984 script, which shows that the characters sing the reprise of “I’ve Known a Lot of Guys” in counterpoint. Diana sings the lyrics about her previous lovers in first person, and Spangler in third. This structure was maintained for the short Broadway run (April 5–15, 1984), as revealed in the playbill and in the published book of The Human Comedy.

Diana and Spangler form the only lovers in this musical that have a happy ending, and Spangler is the only connection between that subplot and the Macaulay’s main plot (he is Homer’s boss and comforts the boy when Marcus dies). Homer gradually learns that everything around him is changing because of the war; Diana and Spangler see changes around them because of their new-found love for each other. If Diana sang about her happiness towards the end of the musical, it would occur too distant from Homer and the Macaulays, and neither the contrast between subplot and main plot nor the fine line between comedy and tragedy would have been effective.

In scene 4 of Caroline, Or Change, during “Dotty and Caroline,” Dotty tells Caroline that a courthouse statue of a Confederate soldier—a symbol of white dominance in the South—has been vandalized. In the scene 8 song “Dotty and Emmie,” Dotty reports to Emmie that the statue was found headless wrapped in a confederate flag thrown in a bayou. Also in scene 8 during the Chanukah party, Caroline gets angry at Emmie for intruding into the Gellman’s conversation and

---

43 Dan Dietz, Off-Broadway Musicals, 1910–2007: Casts, Credits, Songs, Critical Reception and Performance Data of More than 1800 Shows (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2010), 207. The playbill of the Off-Broadway run did not include a list of the musical numbers.

44 William Dumas and Galt MacDermot, Act II Numbers, Playbill 2, no. 6 (March 1984), 42; and MacDermot and Dumas, The Human Comedy, 77–78.
disagreeing with Mr. Stopnick over Martin Luther King Jr. (“Kitchen Fight”). After Caroline tells her off, Emmie belittles her mother’s subservience and sings that social change will bring her material comfort in the future better than Caroline has had in her life (“I Hate the Bus”). In the musical’s epilogue, “Emmie’s Dream,” after Caroline has decided that she cannot embrace changes and returns to work for the Gellman family, Emmie comes to the stage and recounts a dream that reveals that she was part of the group that decapitated the statue and atones for what she said to her mother in scene 8.

This epilogue went through several changes as Kushner and Tesori sought a dramatically satisfying version. In early drafts of the script, the statue’s head came to life to confront Emmie in the epilogue. As it begged to be put back on its body, the head revealed that Emmie vandalized the statue and threw it into the bayou. Emmie’s response and refusal to obey the statue’s head underscored her understanding that times are changing:

EMMIE
Oh mister copper hidden head
Things ain’t been as right as this
For years; and now it starts to spread
Across the South, what was amiss
Begins a metamorphosis,
A word I learnt that mean
It changing…
For what we done, I ain’t the least bit sorry,
I just wish they hadn’t found your body.45

After this proclamation, the statue left the stage, and Emmie and her two little brothers, Jackie and Joe, claimed themselves proud children of a maid who stood strong in difficult times so that they could have a brighter future than hers. The epilogue had this structure in a 1999 reading of the musical and remained constant until late 2003, months before the Off-Broadway opening.

Tesori and Kushner did not spend much time working on the epilogue and with not much time left before opening night, Tesori suggested that the scene with the statue’s head be cut and “Emmie’s Dream” rewritten. She explained: “It was a big mess. We didn't spend enough time on that, and then when we got to the end, we really saw her [Emmie] taking over, and it was really important that she’d come out in a Shakespearian way and said, ‘we have just one more thing, and then you can go home.’ It was me, I did it!”

A script dated from September 16, 2003 reveals changes made to the epilogue and how it was performed during the musical’s Off-Broadway run (November 30, 2003–February 1, 2004). Kushner’s stage directions imply the meta-theatrical function of an epilogue: “Emmie has appeared on the lawn in her nightgown. Caroline looks at her, then goes inside, giving her daughter the stage.” Emmie sings about being scared for keeping a secret and having disobeyed social order. She confesses being part of the group that beheaded the statue: “Now something has changed at the courthouse downtown, and all because of what we did.” She also confesses that the reason for which she stayed after the head fell was because she found out that she was a brave person and attributes this to the strength of her mother. Emmie is happy that she made a change and can now tell Caroline. Jackie and Joe come onstage and ask Emmie to speak low because their mother is sleeping after a hard day of work. With her brothers, Emmie brings the

---


47 Tony Kushner and Jeanine Tesori, Caroline, or Change, Script NCOF+05-1, Performing Arts Research Collection – Theatre, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York. The content of this script is identical to the Off-Broadway performance that the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts has in its Theatre on Film and Tape Archive (video NCOV 2825).

48 Tony Kushner and Jeanine Tesori, Caroline, or Change, Script NCOF+05-1, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, 112.

49 Ibid.
musical to an end, emphasizing her new learning that while Caroline may not be able to embrace social changes, her children—the new generation—can because of her.

EMMIE
I’m the daughter of a maid.
She stands alone where the harsh winds blow:
Salting the earth so nothing grow
Too close; but still her strong blood flow
Under ground through hidden veins,
Down from storm clouds when it rains,
Down the plains, down the high plateau,
Down the Gulf of Mexico.
Down to Larry and Emmie and Jackie and Joe.
The children of Caroline Thibodeaux.  

As Tesori puts it, Emmie “turns shame into ownership.”

After the move to Broadway in April 2004, the musical reached its final version. The structure of the epilogue remained the same as in the Off-Broadway version, but Kushner rewrote some of the lyrics. Emmie does not begin it admitting that she is scared, but extends the meta-theatricality of the stage directions by posing questions sung to newly composed music:

EMMIE
Just one last thing left unsaid:
Who was there when that statue fell?
Who knows where they put his head?
That ol copper Nightmare Man?
Who can say what happened that night at the courthouse?
I can.  

Emmie confesses being part of the beheading with more assertiveness and authority than in the previous script, although Kushner maintained that she was scared:

I was there that night; I saw,

Ibid., 113.


I watched it topple like a tree.
We were scared to death to break the law!
Scared to fail, scared of jail.
But still we stayed."\(^{53}\)

Reminiscent of the first script, Emmie now relates a dialogue that she exchanged with the statue in her dream. Kushner cut the part that Emmie is happy to tell Caroline that she has made a change and replaced it with Emmie telling the statue to go away. When the statue asked her who she was to demand that, Emmie’s answer reflects the message of the musical and echoes the words that the moon and Dotty sang to Caroline in scenes 4 and 11, respectively:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Your time is past now on your way} \\
\text{Get gone and never come again!} \\
\text{For change come fast and change come slow but} \\
\text{Everything changes!} \\
\text{And you got to go!}^{54}
\end{align*}
\]

Tesori employed even the same music that she used for the moon in scene 4. This leads to Jackie and Joe’s entrance, and the conclusion of the epilogue proceeds as it did in the Off-Broadway script. The final version of the epilogue made Emmie’s subplot and her position as a harbinger of change more defined than the previous versions, while still keeping a reference to an inanimate object (the statue’s head), a feature that strongly characterizes Kushner’s script. As scholar James Fischer has put it, “Emmie, with her younger brothers in tow, charges into the new world not only for herself, but to redeem her mother’s backbreaking, heart-wrenching life.”\(^{55}\)

The compositional processes of these songs reveal that addition and curtailing of songs along with extensive rewriting help structure the subordinate function of subplots. In his theory

---

\(^{53}\) Ibid., 126.

\(^{54}\) Ibid.

of drama, Manfred Pfister argues that subplots feature quantitative and functional aspects. The former refers to the length of presentation compared to the main plot, whereas the latter refers to the purpose of a subplot and its correlations with the main one.56 “I’ve Known a Lot of Guys (reprise)” and “Emmie’s Dream” succeed in establishing these two aspects of subplots in song.

**Songs Assigned to Different Characters**

This study has identified two instances in which a song was initially composed for one character but ended up being assigned to another. A comparison between the composer’s first idea for a song and the final decision of which character to sing it reveals different means through which the dramatic action occur in a sung-through structure. The songs in question are “Don’t Tell Me” from *The Human Comedy* and “Without You” from *Rent*.

“Don’t Tell Me,” a song about love enduring and surviving hard times, acquired a different dramatic function as it was assigned to different characters during the compositional process of *The Human Comedy*. In all extant scripts, the song has the same lyrics and follows “In Our Little Town,” a break of the fourth wall by the chorus and the Macaulay family in which they explain, “lots of things occurred, some of it was sad, some of it absurd.”57 In the March 8, 1983 script, the chorus and the Macaulay family sing “Don’t Tell Me” as an ensemble number. The song about love thriving in war times continues the narration and commentary on the action that “In Our Little Town” had initiated. In the reading script (October 21, 1983), each of the

---


57 MacDermot and Dumaresq, *The Human Comedy*, 43.
song’s four stanzas was assigned to two chorus members, named Lisa and Louis.\footnote{MacDermot and Dumaresq, Script Versions: \textit{The Human Comedy}, version A, Box 3-165, folder 3, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. Dumaresq named chorus members in early drafts and kept them until the final version of the work, even if these names appear only in stage directions.} By having two characters singing the song, Dumaresq and MacDermot turned the song into a duet and restricted it to romantic love, not family or friendship love. In the November 30, 1983 script, stage directions became more specific than before: “A girl at home (named Lisa)” sings the first stanza, and “a soldier at the front (named Louis)” sings the second.\footnote{MacDermot and Dumaresq, Script Versions: \textit{The Human Comedy}, version A, Box 3-165, folder 4, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, 22.} The third stanza is marked to be a duet, and the fourth sung by all (presumably the chorus joins the soloists).\footnote{Ibid., 23.} By specifying the location of the girl and the boy, the song now mirrors the action of the main plot: Marcus at the war front, and his family in Ithaca, California. The presentation of the song may focus on romantic love, but conceptually, it included family love too.

The Broadway script replaced Lisa and Louis with the protagonists Mary Arena and Marcus. They were a couple before Marcus went to fight in the war, and throughout the story Mary Arena claims to be still in love and waiting for his return. Marcus, too, sings about Mary and their love while in the war. Presented by Mary in Ithaca and Marcus on the war front, the song no longer comments on the musical’s action, but dramatizes it. The song is not so much about transcendence of love in general but that of Mary Arena and Marcus. “Don’t Tell Me” is the only song that these two characters sing together.\footnote{The published book of the musical has Mary Arena and Marcus singing “Don’t Tell Me” (MacDermot and Dumaresq, \textit{The Human Comedy}, 44).}
The song “Without You” in Rent developed in a similar way to “Don’t Tell Me”: Larson never changed the lyrics, but assigned different characters to sing it in several drafts of the script between 1992 and 1996. Larson included “Without You” in the July 1992 script and placed it in the second act. The song indicates that the plot has moved to the spring of the year in which the dramatic action takes place. In the style of a list song, the lyrics describe different ways that life continues despite the singing character’s suffering pain for being without a loved one. In this first version, most of the protagonists participate, and each one is given a stanza and a different addressee:

JOANNE (to MAUREEN)
Without you
The ground thaws
The rain falls
The grass grows

COLLINS (to ANGEL)
Without you
The seeds root
The flowers bloom
The children play

JOANNE and COLLINS
The stars gleam
The poets dream
The eagles fly
Without you

JOANNE, COLLINS, and MARK
The Earth turns
The sun burns
But I die
Without you

Angel does not sing a stanza solo, but he is Collins’s addressee and joins the number in the final four stanzas, when all sing.

For the 1993 reading script, Larson changed the song into a solo number for Joanne. Larson scratched the names of all other characters, maintaining just “Joanne (to Maureen).” Larson’s personal material for the reading indicates this change: he wrote down which song each character sings, and “Without You” appears below Joanne’s name. On another sheet, he divided the numbers into groups (solos, duets, small groups, and company numbers). “Without You” appears as a solo. Larson probably intended the number to further Joanne’s characterization and feelings for Maureen, which had been conspicuously absent in the 1992 script.

In the July 1994 script, the song became a duet for Joanne and Maureen. Joanne sings the first four stanzas, Maureen sings the next five, and together they sing the final four. Larson kept the other characters on stage during the number and specified that their actions are the same as in the 1992 script. For the October 25, 1994 script, Larson kept it as a duet for Joanne and Maureen, but changed the action of the other characters in the background. The tender lyrics of this song contrasted with the bossy and irreverent manner that Maureen treats Joanne in their other song, “Female to Female.” It also contradicted Maureen’s feelings, since Larson had maintained that Maureen and Mark were not completely over each other. This was the version that was performed in the fall workshop.

In the September 12, 1995 script, Larson changed the song into a solo number for Mimi. He no longer stipulated the other characters’ actions, indicating that only Mimi sings sitting on one bed, while Collins and Angel are in another. This is how the song went into rehearsal in the

63 Jonathan Larson, _Rent_ Show Materials, Lead Sheets, Programs, Miscellany, Box 13, Folder 2, Jonathan Larson Papers, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.


December 19, 1995 script. Larson just altered the dialogue that precedes it, having Roger saying that he will sleep in his place that night to finish his song.\textsuperscript{67} Sometime in late 1995 and early 1996, the song became a duet again, but now for Mimi and Roger. In this version, which was maintained for the Broadway run and the licensed version of the musical, Mimi sings eight stanzas, Roger sings just one, and both sing the final three together. The two protagonists who did not participate in the song’s very first version, now lead it. Stage directions indicate that Joanne and Maureen get together and Angel’s health worsens as Mimi drugs herself.\textsuperscript{68} The song enacts Mimi’s obliviousness to what happens around her as her heroin addiction worsens. Even if sung by just two characters, the number can be considered to be a commentary not just of Mimi and Roger, but also between Mimi and her drug addiction, Joanne and Maureen, and Collins and Angel, who are all present onstage during Mimi’s singing. The action that Larson entered in the stage directions for this song dramatizes the lyrics.

Changing the characters who sing a song can significantly affect the way that the dramatic action develops and is communicated through song. Dumaresq, MacDermot, and Larson had to consider how these songs were going to be dramatized in performance. As “Don’t Tell Me” moved from chorus members to Mary Arena and Marcus, the song enabled them to express their love that early drafts of the musical lacked. Larson deepened the characterization of every character that he assigned to sing “Without You,” eventually realizing that all protagonists share the message of the song. His clever move was to change it from an ensemble number to a duet while using stage directions to underscore the commentary that the number has for all the protagonists.


\textsuperscript{68} Jonathan Larson, \textit{Rent}, 108.
Changes made to a song’s lyrics and content considerably alter the progression of the dramatic action. The sung-through musical does not have spoken dialogues to contextualize or queue songs, and the slightest change in a song’s content or structure can have a significant impact on the story and plot, even when the song occupies the same location in the sequence of songs that constitute the musical. The changes made to these songs created essential parts of musicalized scenes, which according to musical theater historian Mark Horowitz develops “something over several minutes that’s neither repetitious nor scattershot. It’s about textures and figuration. It’s the tension between something that sounds inevitable but unexpected. And all of this in service of a lyric, a character and their emotions.”

---

Chapter 5
How Changes Made to Songs’ Structure and Their Placement in the Plot Affect Dramatic Action

This chapter demonstrates how changes made in specific songs during the compositional process affected the creation and development of the dramatic action. In addition to changes in music and lyrics, this chapter considers alterations made to the position of songs: it investigates songs that appeared in different parts of the plot and songs that were cut and/or replaced. These changes reveal distinct versions of a musical’s plot and also the creative team’s struggle to find the right place and purpose for a song. First, I focus on eight songs that appeared in different parts of their respective plots. Changes in music and lyrics were necessary to accommodate the song each time it was given a new position in the plot. I investigate the creative team’s purposes for placing a song in different places and how each change altered the story. Second, I consider changes in both the sequence of song and the dramatic action caused by songs that were cut or replaced during the compositional process.

“Long Past Sunset” (The Human Comedy)

In Saroyan’s novel Homer’s father, Matthew, died before the beginning of the story. Dumaresq retained this in his adaptation of The Human Comedy, but made Matthew appear physically onstage when Homer’s widowed mother, Katie, thinks of him. The song “Long Past Sunset” features Matthew onstage when Katie thinks of him, depicting her gratitude for still feeling his presence even after his death.

Changes to this song altered its dramatic function. In Act I, Ulysses, in his incessant desire to understand the world around him, asks his mother about his father and the reason why
he never returns home. Katie explains life and death to her young son until he falls asleep, after which she thinks of Matthew. In the March 8, 1993 script, Katie discusses life and death in the songs “Death Is Not an Easy Thing,” “The Birds in the Sky,” and “Remember Always to Give.” After Bess carries a sleeping Ulysses to bed, Katie sings Mathew’s name three times “very emotionally.” He replies by singing her name three times.¹

The song “Long Past Sunset” appears in Act II, following Homer’s despair after he hears that his brother Marcus has died in action. Sung by the chorus, “Long Past Sunset” comments on the action, comforting that Marcus will live on and be with the Macaulay family forever:

CHORUS
I’ll be so near to you,
When you’re asleep,
I will appear to you
When you are dreaming.

Long past sunset,
Though day is done, oh listen, do!
Long past sunset,
I’ll be with you.²

In the October 21, 1983 reading script, Katie sings “Death is Not an Easy Thing” and “Remember Always to Give” to Ulysses, but Bess explains the circle of life in “The Birds in the Sky.” “Long Past Sunset” now follows, inserted after Katie says Matthew’s name three times. He sings the song to her, using the same words that the chorus had used in the March script. The message that a deceased person lives on in the memories of those alive comes earlier than it did

---


² Ibid., 52.
in the March script and comments on the action, since Matthew (in Katie’s imagination) uses the words to comfort her. His repeating of her name three times occurs towards the end of the song.³

MacDermot and Dumaresq retained the original version of “Long Past Sunset” after Homer’s despair in Act II, but assigned Katie to sing it with the chorus. Thus, they expanded the song’s dramatic function in the second act: it is now a reprise, a song that dramatizes Katie’s memories of Matthew’s words to comfort Homer.⁴ In the November 30, 1983 script, and the Off-Broadway and Broadway scripts, MacDermot and Dumaresq extended the song’s function of commenting on the action to Matthew’s rendition in Act I. The chorus joins his singing to comfort Katie and addresses the audience.⁵

“Poor, Unsuccessful, and Fat” (A New Brain)

“Poor, Unsuccessful, and Fat” occurs when Richard, one of the nurses attending to Gordon, gives him a sponge bath the day before his MRI. In comic relief, Richard complains about what his life has amounted to as he bathes the patient. Richard sings that Gordon will soon be fine and out of the hospital, but he will remain there poor, unsuccessful, and fat. This causes Gordon to think about his own career, and he sings “I am not successful” in harmony with Richard. Mr. Bungee, Gordon’s boss, appears (in Gordon’s imagination) and belittles his talent as a songwriter. He employs Richard’s music to call Gordon “poor, unsuccessful, and dumb, and


⁴ Ibid., 52.

⁵ Galt MacDermot and William Dumaresq, Script Versions: The Human Comedy, version A, The New York Shakespeare Festival Records, Series III, Box 3-165, folder 4, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York. In the original production, Matthew and Marcus were played by the same actor, Don Kehr, reinforcing the song’s message that those who die live on in the memories of those who live.
untalented.” Richard stops singing once Mr. Bungee appears, and Bungee and Gordon bring the song to an end.

On June 27–29, 1996, Lincoln Center presented a workshop performance of A New Brain. “Poor, Unsuccessful, and Fat/Thin” consisted of a short duet between Richard and Gordon and occurred late in the dramatic action, following Gordon’s song “In the Middle of the Room.” The action again depicted Richard giving Gordon a sponge bath and complaining. Richard’s lyrics are similar to the 1998 final script. Gordon, however, does not sing the line “I am not successful.” He sings an entire stanza of his own:

GORDON
Poor, unsuccessful, and thin.
I’m getting ready to re-begin
Feeling redundant, like an extra finger
I was born to linger, cause I’m poor, unsuccessful,
Poor, unsuccessful, and thin
And feeling older.

Both men repeated the words “poor and unsuccessful,” and a crescendo culminates in the burst of Gordon’s Arterial Venous Malformation (AVM). In this workshop version, the song already functioned as comic relief in which Gordon relates to Richard’s low self-esteem, but in the original production, Lapine expanded it to include the influence that Mr. Bungee has on Gordon’s opinion of himself, instead of having the protagonist complaining about being too thin.

---

6 William Finn and James Lapine, A New Brain (New York: Samuel French, 1999), 36.
7 Lincoln Center Theater Presents a Workshop of A New Brain, program, 2. In the original production “Poor, Unsuccessful, and Fat” occurred five songs before “In the Middle of the Room.”
8 William Finn and James Lapine, A New Brain (Workshop), video NCOV 1946, Performing Arts Research Collections, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Billy Rose Theater Division, New York. The lyrics have been transcribed from the video.
“Will I” (*Rent*)

“Will I” is a one-stanza song whose lyrics reflect the fears and insecurities of people with AIDS:

- Will I lose my dignity?
- Will someone care?
- Will I awake tomorrow
- From the nightmare?

Larson believ the simplicity of the song by having it sung in canon by four different groups, creating a contrapuntal texture. The song functions as a reminder that at the height of the AIDS crisis in the early 1990s victims were worried about how their HIV status would affect their personal lives and how people would judge them. The cast of *Rent* freezes the dramatic action during this song, which puts the focus solely on the issue. Larson experimented placing “Will I” in various parts of the first act, combining it with several different plotlines.

Larson attended several support group meetings like the one depicted in *Rent*. During a discussion at one of the meetings, he heard a man asking “will I lose my dignity?,” inspiring the song and its context. “Will I” first appears in the July 1992 script. It follows Mimi’s “Out Tonight” and dramatizes the “HIV Positive Support Group meeting” that Collins and Angel attend on Christmas Eve. The number also included dancers who wear Halloween masks that had first appeared in a nightmare that Mimi had previously in the plot. Larson did not specify in

---


the stage directions any connection between the group meeting and Mimi’s nightmare, but the masks might signify a means of hiding fear and shame for being HIV positive.

In the July 1994 script, Larson made “Will I” the Act I finale. It occurred after “La Vie Bohème” and before “I Should Tell You.” The Life Support meeting took place upstage, while the main cast remained in the restaurant where they had sung “La Vie Bohème.” Some homeless people also joined the singing, and Roger and Mimi learn that they are both HIV positive as one sees the other singing the song. Larson may have considered “Will I” appropriate as the act I finale because since the lyrics consist of questions, the song thus functions as a cliffhanger for the community portrayed onstage, the same way that “I Should Tell You” functions as a cliffhanger for Mimi and Roger’s relationship at the end of Act I. He abandoned the idea in the next two scripts (September and October 1994) and moved the song after Collins and Angel’s love duet “I’ll Cover You.”

In the September 12, 1995 script, the entire Act I consisted of a flashback from Angel’s funeral. Larson moved “Will I” even earlier in Act I than the 1992 script. For this new draft, Larson composed a new song, “Life Support,” which dramatizes the group meeting and Mark’s late arrival. This number segued to Mimi echoing the group’s motto “no day but today” to Roger in “Another Day.” The dramatic action then returned to the “present,” and Mark sang the second part of “Halloween.” Larson inserted “Will I” after these three songs, providing a scenario for

---


14 The first part of “Halloween” occurred as the first song of Act I. I discuss “Halloween” in the September 12, 1995 script below.
everyone onstage to sing about their fears of AIDS. However, for the rehearsal script (December 19, 1995), Larson eliminated the flashback structure and moved “Will I” before “Life Support” and “Another Day.”

In the early January 1996 scripts, “Will I” occurred after “Life Support,” Mimi’s “Out Tonight,” and Mimi and Roger’s “Another Day.” In a song list dated January 11, 1996, “Will I” followed Angel and Collins’s “I’ll Cover You.” This placement was maintained throughout the musical’s Off-Broadway run. It was not until the Broadway run that the song was moved to after the sequence “Life Support,” “Out Tonight,” and “Another Day” but before “I’ll Cover You.” Thus, “Will I” in its final placement bridges two different attitudes towards AIDS: those who struggle to accept it (group members and Roger) and those who decide to make the best of the remaining time that they have (Collins and Angel).

“Out Tonight” (Rent)

“Out Tonight” functions as Mimi’s “I want” song. The lyrics depict her desire to go out and enjoy herself without worrying about the consequences. The lyrics present the most bohemian philosophy in the musical:

---


18 Since the placement of “Will I” is different in the Off-Broadway and the Broadway scripts, its final placement was made after Larson’s death (he died before previews of the Off-Broadway run), probably by director Michael Greif.
MIMI
I've had a knack from way back
At breaking the rules once I learn the games
Get up! Life's too quick, I know someplace sick
Where this chick’ll dance in the flames

... So let’s find a bar
So dark we forget who we are
Where all the scars
From the nevers and maybes die.¹⁹

The song also introduces some lasciviousness to Mimi’s behavior. As she sings this song, Mimi enters Roger’s loft, finds him alone, and asks him to take her out. She seductively kisses him at the end of the song.²⁰

The various locations for this song produced different dramatic situations. Larson composed “Out Tonight” around February and March of 1992.²¹ He included it in the July 1992 script, halfway into Act I. It originally followed Mark and Maureen’s “Male to Female” and preceded “Will I.” Unlike in the final version of the musical, Mimi sings the entire song to Roger. Larson’s stage direction reads: “Roger sits at the table, dejected. She begins trying to seduce him to get up.”²² In the 1994 scripts, Larson made “Out Tonight” the second number and Mimi’s entrance song. His description for the song indicates, “She telephones friends trying to convince them to go out—but after they all turn her down, she takes a small stash bag of heroin and prepares a syringe.”²³ When not singing to someone over the phone, Mimi sings to her own

---

¹⁹ Larson, Rent, 41–42.

²⁰ Ibid., 43.


image in the mirror while she tries different outfits before going out. This is how the song was performed in the fall workshop of 1994. In the September 12, 1995 script, Mimi sings it to Roger again (no phone or mirror) in the middle of Act I, but the dramatic action segues to Mark and Maureen, then to the group meeting before returning to Roger’s request to leave him alone in “Another Day.” This was the first script that Larson thought of “Another Day” as a reaction to “Out Tonight.” In previous scripts “Another Day” was a reaction to “Light My Candle,” or it stood alone.

In the rehearsal script (December 19, 1995), Larson moved “Out Tonight” five songs before “Another Day.” It followed the newly composed “You’ll See” and featured Mimi by herself trying different outfits again in front of a mirror. The disassociation of “Another Day” and Roger’s absence from the scene isolate the song, giving it a quality of randomness in the song sequence. Considering what happened to “Will I” in the same script, it appears that in November and December of 1995, Larson retracted some changes he had made in September. This occurred probably because of time constraints and Larson’s reluctance to rewrite the script and eliminate the flashback structure, which NYTW artistic director Jim Nicola and stage director Greif had requested. In the January 1996 scripts, Larson cut one stanza from the song and placed “Out Tonight” halfway into the first act again, paired with “Another Day.” The final placement of “Out Tonight” was maintained for the Broadway run and subsequent publication and licensing. Mimi’s entrance song remained “Light My Candle,” providing a nice parallel with Puccini’s La Bohème.


“Santa Fe” (Rent)

Billy Aronson wrote the lyrics for “Santa Fe” in the 1989 script, and Larson retained them virtually unchanged during the compositional process, only shifting its place in the plot. Aronson conceived the song as Collins’s (then named Cornell’s) entrance song early in Act I, upon his arrival at Ralph and Mark’s loft. The lyrics reflect the character’s background in philosophy and politics, which causes his dismay with conditions in New York City (representing life in America in general) and hopes for a better life in Santa Fe (representing a place far from New York). When Larson continued working on the musical by himself in 1991, he kept “Santa Fe” as Collins’s entrance song, but moved its action to the street after Collins is mugged. In the 1992 and 1993 scripts, Collins sings it with Angel and some homeless people. Larson added a new opening to the song in which the homeless people admit that New York is the center of the universe, but not the best place to live, dialogue assigned to Collins and Angel in subsequent versions of the song. Larson also added a spoken dialogue in the middle of the song, in which they comment on American education:

ANGEL. You teach?
COLLINS. I teach. Computer-age philosophy. But students would rather watch TV.
RUDY [a homeless]. America.
ALL. America!

In later versions, after Rudy was cut, Angel says the first “America.”

As Larson prepared Rent for the 1994 fall workshop, he finished the song “You Okay Honey,” which features Angel and Collins’s first meeting, and moved “Santa Fe” later in the act. He created the scene and song “Christmas Bells #2/Bummer,” in which Mark, Collins, and Angel witness a policeman mistreating a homeless woman, and Mark records the event with his

---

camera. When they try to help the homeless woman, she becomes defensive. This song became a prologue to “Santa Fe.” Similar to the 1992 and 1993 scripts, Collins and Angel have a bad experience in the streets of New York and sing about moving away. In this new position, “Santa Fe” happens not immediately after Collins and Angel’s meeting, but hours later, when they are better acquainted with one another. Also, the song’s new placement allows Mark to join in.

Larson included Collins and Angel’s love duet “I’ll Cover You” also in the July 1994 script. However, it was not until the October 25, 1994 script that he paired it with “Santa Fe.” These two songs together deepen the characterization of Collins and Angel and how much their infatuation with each other grows over the course of a day. Similar to “Will I” and “Out Tonight” in the November and December 1995 scripts, Larson discarded the pairing and placed “Santa Fe” several songs before “I’ll Cover You,” isolating the dramatic action that happens in each song. They were paired again in the January 1, 1996 script and have maintained this placement.

“Halloween” (*Rent*)

In all scripts in which it appears, “Halloween” has the same action: Mark in late October, at Angel’s funeral, looks back at the events and changes that his group of friends has experienced since the previous Christmas. Mark credits the previous December 24 as the origin of all the happiness and tragedy that have occurred. However, Larson’s song shuffling and extensive revisions made “Halloween” acquire different dramatic functions.

Larson first included “Halloween” in the September 12, 1995 script, in which he made Act I and the first half of Act II of *Rent* a flashback from Angel’s funeral. The musical’s

---


dramatic action begins with “a small professional documentary film crew” at the funeral.

Amongst short spoken lines by the cameraman and the assistant director, Mark sings “Halloween”:

MARK
How did we get here?
How the hell…
Pan left—close on the steeple of the church.

. . .
A Halloween funeral
A memorial service for someone we know who died.
Faces at the funeral

. . .
How did I get here?
How the hell…
Christmas!
God damned Christmas.
It all began on—cut to—flashback
Christmas Eve last year.  

By posing questions that will be explored throughout the musical, the song prompts the flashback, and makes Mark as the intermediary between the drama and the audience, a position maintained for the character until the musical’s final version.

Larson entered “Halloween II” in the middle of Act I, following “Another Day.” After the protagonists and their conflicts have been introduced, the dramatic action returns to the “present,” and Mark and his film making crew comment on the action:

MARK
How could a night so frozen be so scalding hot?

. . .
How can a morning this mild be so raw?

. . .
Why are entire years strew
On the cutting-room floor of memory?
When single frames of one magic night

Flicker forever in close-up  
On the 3d Imax of my mind?

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR  
That’s poetic.

SOUND MAN  
That’s pathetic. He’s out of it.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR  
How’d Newsline let him direct?

CAMERA MAN  
Give him a break.  
That’s his friend, I suspect.

MARK  
Why did Mimi knock on Roger’s door  
And Collins choose that phone booth  
Back where Angel set up his drums?  
Why did Maureen’s equipment break down?

Why Am I the witness?  
Why do words of a stranger  
Spoken months ago  
Haunt me even now?\(^\text{30}\)

In the rehearsal script (December 19, 1995), Larson restricted the flashback structure to the first half of Act II only. Act I developed linearly, and Larson even composed an overture. He moved “Halloween” to be the opening of Act II, entered before “Seasons of Love.” The two parts of “Halloween” from the September script are united as one continuous number.\(^\text{31}\)

In the January 1, 1996 script, Larson removed the flashback structure altogether, and both acts developed linearly. He moved “Halloween” to the middle of Act II, following Angel’s funeral and the song “I’ll Cover You (Reprise).” Larson cut the dialogue involving the film making crew and made the song a solo number for Mark. Some of the lines spoken by the crew

\(^{30}\) Ibid., 30.

members, such as the comments that Mark’s metaphors are poetic and pathetic, still appear in this new version, but sung by Mark himself. Larson cut some of Mark’s lyrics and rewrote the last stanza as following:

MARK
Why am I the witness?
And when I capture it on film
Will it mean that it’s the end
And I’m alone? \(^{32}\)

Larson also entered some spoken lines underscored by the song’s opening vamp, in which Mark talks on the phone to Buzzline personnel and admits to have signed a contract to work for them as a videographer. This adds a new layer to the song: Mark has given up his own independent film and chosen to work for Buzzline. Larson may have removed the flashback structure from the musical’s plot, but this career decision becomes the final straw to make Mark revisit the events of the recent past. Larson turned it into an introspective soliloquy, allowing the character to question both his past and future.

“How Did We Come to This?” (*The Wild Party*)

“How Did We Come to This?,” the last song in *The Wild Party*, features Queenie questioning her choice of throwing a wild party just to provoke her husband after the party has ended in tragedy. The changes made to the song and the spot that it occupied in the plot affected the development of the dramatic action and the musical’s message.

Lippa first wrote this song for Mae, one of the party guests, to sing in the middle of Act II. Originally, it followed “The Fight,” in which Burrs and Eddie (Mae’s boyfriend) fight after

Burrs mistakes Mae for Queenie and tries to hit her. Mae tends to a bruised Eddie and questions the party they are attending. The song’s bridge featured lyrics that condemned the party guests’ behavior:

MAE
Wasn’t this supposed to be a party?
Weren’t we supposed to be friends?
Someone changed the rules
Made us all look fools.
But fools should know by now
That every party ends.

Lippa gave Mae an insight and maturity regarding the wild party that the character does not exhibit in any other part of the musical.

Later in the compositional process, Lippa re-wrote some of the lyrics, added a new accompaniment, and moved the song to be Queenie’s final lament at the end of the show, after her lover murders her husband. He maintained the same form (AABA with a coda), but made changes in the lyrics to reflect Queenie’s insecurities. She sings in the bridge’s new lyrics,

QUEENIE
Tell me I’ve been living in a daydream
Tell me I’ve been talking in my sleep
If I’ve been awake
Pardon my mistake
But time is running low
And talk is growing cheap.

---

33 Andrew Lippa, interview by author, New York, NY, June 20, 2015.

34 Lippa wrote the song for Kristin Chenoweth, who played Mae in readings and workshops of the musical between 1997 and 1999. Chenoweth made a demo cast recording of this early version of “How Did We Come to This?,” and the lyrics have been transcribed from the recording. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O1rtiEYiBes (accessed on July 13, 2016).

35 Andrew Lippa, interview by author, New York, NY, June 20, 2015. In this interview, Lippa could not remember when he made these changes.

Lippa also changed the lyrics for the coda. Mae’s phrases do not necessarily comport with what she sees at the party:

MAE
Women cry
Babies wail
People die
And parties fail
How did we come to this?37

Conversely, Queenie’s words for the same stanza moralize the musical’s entire dramatic action, including her own choices:

QUEENIE
Time goes by
Plans go stale
People die
And parties fail
How did we come to this?38

The maturity displayed in the lyrics are no longer thrust upon a character but have turned into observations derived from the protagonist’s journey.

Lippa considered replacing the song with a new one later in the process, but the decision did not prove effective. The song “Just One Day” replaced “How Did We Come to This?” for a few performances of The Wild Party.39 The lyrics of “Just One Day” focused on Queenie’s feelings for Black and how he embodied the changes that she hoped for at the beginning of the story, but which lasted just one day. Queenie even considers pursuing Black and leaving everything she has behind. The song would not have been a successful finale because it fails to explore Queenie’s feelings toward the situation and the characters involved. “How Did We

37 The lyrics have been transcribed from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O1rtiEYiBes (accessed on July 13, 2016).


39 Andrew Lippa, interview by author, New York, NY, June 20, 2015.
Come to This?,” even if provides a moral to the musical and the protagonist’s choices, it addresses the situation that resulted from Queenie’s wild party in both the private and public aspects of her life.40

The Case of “I’m Breaking Down”

Finn’s song “I’m Breaking Down” marks an example of a song that appears not just in different versions of one musical (In Trousers), but one that has was included in two additional musicals: March of the Falsettos and Falsettos. Finn altered the lyrics of the song throughout the process, but always maintained the same music. I explore below Finn’s reasons for moving the song from one musical to another and the implications that the song has had in the different plots in which it has appeared.

The musical In Trousers existed in two early versions before Finn decided on a final one. Unlike the other musicals in this study, Finn considerably revised In Trousers in two Off-Broadway revivals, which were produced in New York City after the original 1979 run. The first revisal ran from February 12 to March 7, 1981 at Second Stage Theatre, and the second ran from March 26 to April 7, 1985 at the Promenade Theatre.41

Finn composed “I’m Breaking Down” for the first revisal of In Trousers. He inserted it in the part of the musical that depicts Marvin and his wife’s marriage falling apart.42 In the original 1979 production, Marvin’s wife did not have a solo song to express her side of the

---

40 Lippa made considerable changes to The Wild Party for the 2015 New York City Center’s summer series Encores! Off-Center (July 15–18, 2015). He cut “How Did We Come to This?” and replaced it with a new song, “Happy Ending,” tailored for Sutton Foster, the actress playing Queenie.

41 I discuss the song sequences created for each production and differences between them in chapter 6.

42 Marvin’s wife is named Trina in March of the Falsettos, Falsettoland, and Falsettos. In the three productions of In Trousers, she was simply “the wife.”
divorce. Only the duet “Breakfast Over Sugar” gave her a voice during the marital crises, but one that attempts to maintain a sense of normalcy. In the 1981 revisal, “I’m Breaking Down” immediately succeeded “A Breakfast Over Sugar,” and she could sing about her situation, her suspicions regarding Marvin’s extramarital affair, and her thoughts about her own position:

WIFE
I’d much prefer to sleep with magazines.  
Instead I sleep with him and Benzedrines.  
And a knife.  
Which pretty much defines my life.  
I’m a perfect wife.

...  
On the extension once I heard him talk.  
I have a feeling that it’s someone tall.  
This caller maybe don’t exist at all.  
Don’t is wrong. sing along  
What was the noun?  
I’m breaking down.

...  
I’ve rethought the fun we’ve had, and one fact does emerge:  
I played a foolish clown,  
The almost virgin who sings the dirge is on the verge of  
Breaking down.  
I’m breaking down.43

The 1981 revisal of In Trousers furthered the characterization of the wife by providing a moment for her to present her true feelings and perspective on her husband leaving her for another man. As one critic described it: “The song is an anthem for the sexually starved, and Miss Dezina [actress Kate Dezina] is not so much angry as desperate when she sings it. There is good deal of silliness written about why marriages fail; Miss Dezina tells it better.”44


In the 1985 revisal, Finn gave the wife a new song in which she sings about Marvin’s change in behavior, “I Feel Him Slipping Away.” This ballad, in which the wife believes that Marvin has another female lover, provides a tender depiction of feelings that contrasts with the panic and frustrations of “I’m Breaking Down,” making the latter more surprising and funnier than the 1981 version. Finn replaced the first stanza of the song with an expression of the wife’s desires and a grudge towards Marvin:

WIFE
I’d like to be a princess on a throne,
To have a country I can call my own.
And a King
Who’s lusty and requires a fling
With a female thing.

I think it’s rotten how I lately feel.
It’s like a nightmare how it all proceeds.
I hope that Whizzer don’t fulfill his needs.
Don’t is wrong! Sing along,
What was the noun?
I’m breaking down.45

Finn also moved the position of “I’m Breaking Down” in the song sequence of In Trousers. The song now follows Marvin’s “Whizzer Going Down” and precedes “Breakfast Over Sugar.” The wife’s breakdown now occurs after the audience learned of Whizzer and witnessed Marvin’s excitement about him, and it allows the wife to get her true feelings off her chest before a last meal with Marvin. Finn plotted the song more efficiently in this version of the musical than in the first revisal.

Finn and Lapine added “I’m Breaking Down” to March of the Falsettos in the interim period between the 1981 and 1985 revisals of In Trousers. In 1982 they traveled to Los Angeles,

where Lapine directed the West Coast opening of _March of the Falsettos_.\textsuperscript{46} The three male adults in the show also came from New York (Michael Rupert, Stephen Bogardus, and Chip Zien), but the production hired a local actress, Melanie Chartoff, to play Trina. According to Finn, Chartoff was a local star, and the producers wanted her to have an additional moment alone onstage other than “Trina’s Song.” Finn offered the song that he had composed for Marvin’s unnamed wife a year before in the Second Stage revisal of _In Trousers_.\textsuperscript{47} They inserted the song in the first half of this one-act musical, between “This Had Better Come to a Stop” and “Please Come to My House.” The song occupies a crucial moment for the character: after her relationships with ex-husband and son have been exposed, but before the psychiatrist Mendel reveals his feelings for her.

Finn edited some of the lyrics, deepening Trina’s mental confusion:

\begin{quote}
I’m breaking down, my life is shitty.  
And my kid seems like an idiot to me.  
I mean, that’s sick.  
I mean, he’s great.  
It’s me who is the matter, 
Talking madder than the maddest hatter.\textsuperscript{48}
\end{quote}

This stanza proved so effective that Finn kept it for the 1985 version of _In Trousers_. The new lyrics to the song in _March of the Falsettos_ included the first time that the wife refers to Whizzer:

\begin{quote}
Whizzer is sweet and trim.  
I think he sets the trends.  
I think in fact I’ll marry him.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{46} This production opened on April 21, 1982 and played in the Huntington Hartford Theatre in Hollywood, now named The Montalbán Theater.

\textsuperscript{47} William Finn, interview by author, New York, NY, June 8, 2015.

\textsuperscript{48} These lyrics appear in Melanie Chartoff’s recording of the song, which is not commercially available. She has made it available for listeners on her personal website. These lyrics have been published in Finn, _The Marvin Songs_, 68. The song appears in _In Trousers_ in this book but not _March of the Falsettos_.

190
He wants me!\textsuperscript{49}

But Finn also edited the lyrics to accommodate the song in a new dramatic context, making her refer to Mendel’s psychiatric help:

\begin{verbatim}
Doctor Mendel says I’m not diseased.
He says my life won’t end up on some shelf
My doctor Mendel may be sick himself
Still he’s cute, won’t pollute
What was the noun?
I’m breaking down.\textsuperscript{50}
\end{verbatim}

The insertion of “I’m Breaking Down” gave more depth to Trina than she had in the original production of \textit{March of the Falsettos}. No other song fulfilled the dramatic function that “I’m Breaking Down” does. In “Love Is Blind” and “This Had Better Come to a Stop,” Trina sings about her frustrations as Marvin’s wife. The focus, however, is on Marvin: how came out and how his patriarchal values and spoiled behavior affected their fragile marriage. In “Trina’s Song” she sings about her feelings for Mendel and debates her role in a situation in which she is the only woman:

\begin{verbatim}
TRINA
I’m tired,
So tired of all the happy men who rule the world.

\ldots
I’ll laugh, then watch us fade.
I’ll laugh, then fire the maid.\textsuperscript{51}
\end{verbatim}

In “Making a Home,” she and Mendel sing about their happy life together, and Trina accepts her role:

\textsuperscript{49} These lyrics, too, appear in Chartoff’s recording. They have been published in William Finn, \textit{Falsettos: March of the Falsettos and Falsettoland} by William Finn and James Lapine, and \textit{In Trousers} by William Finn (New York: Plume Drama, 1992), 53. “I’m Breaking Down” appears in \textit{March of the Falsettos} in this book, but not \textit{In Trousers}.

\textsuperscript{50} The lyrics have been transcribed from Chartoff’s recording, \url{http://www.melaniechartoff.com/audioperformances.html} (accessed on June 10, 2015).

\textsuperscript{51} Finn, \textit{The Marvin Songs}, 148–55.
MENDEL and TRINA
Welcome to our humble place,
We’re concerned with setting a tone,
With filling the space,
Making a home.

MENDEL
She becomes a happy wife.

TRINA
He decides the role to assume,
Building a life.52

Similar to In Trousers, Trina had no song to express her true feelings and ambivalence towards the divorce and her husband’s sexual orientation. “I’m Breaking Down” reveals Trina’s chagrin and shame in a way that no other song in March of the Falsettos could. Chartoff saw the new layers that the song added to character development: “I remember discussing with James Lapine the wacky wildness of Trina’s mind for this musical triumph. She’s alternately self-recriminating, then accusatory; positive, then bleaky negative. The song grew more coherent in rehearsals when I got into the brain of a humiliated woman breaking down.”53

The inclusion of the song was so successful that it became an option in March of the Falsettos without being removed from In Trousers. When Finn and Lapine conceived the double bill Falsettos, they kept “I’m Breaking Down” in the same spot that it had occupied in the 1982 Los Angeles production of March of the Falsettos. The lyrics included stanzas that dated back to the original 1981 version of the song, changes made in 1982 (for March of the Falsettos in Los Angeles), and changes made in 1985 (for the second revisal of In Trousers in New York). The song also had some lines from previous versions rearranged and some new ones. These changes,

52 Ibid., 164–65.

53 Melanie Chartoff, e-mail to the author, June 9, 2015.
however, did not alter the song’s main dramatic function: a soliloquy for Trina to reveal her true feelings.

“I’m Breaking Down” stood out in the double bill among all other moments that Trina had onstage. Critics praised the actress who played Trina, Barbara Walsh, for her interpretation. As Frank Rich described it, Trina is “no longer a resilient comedian with a belter’s voice but, in Ms. Walsh’s modestly sung but hugely affecting performance, a rueful figure who is allowed genuine as well as comic anger at all ‘the happy men who rule the world.’”

Cut or Replaced Songs

In this section I discuss alterations in the song order resulting from when a composer chose to cut or replace a song. Ten songs were present in at least one early version of Wings, Rent, A New Brain, The Wild Party, and The Last Five Years that never made it to the final version. I consider below what these cut songs communicated and the impact that their omission had in the plot and development of the action of their respective musicals.

The music therapy session that Amy leads at the rehabilitation center in Wings was initially conceived as a song. Following Emily’s “I Wonder What’s Inside,” she joins other patients in the center for occupational therapy. Amy and the other patients sing “Let Me Call You Sweetheart,” which leads to Emily’s remembering parts of her song “The New Daredevils of the Air.” The scene moves to Amy trying to get information about the song from Emily, introducing her to the other patients, and facilitating a dialogue between four victims of aphasia (Emily, Billy, Mrs. Timmins, and Mr. Brambilla).

---

An early idea for a song had Amy assigning an activity for them to perform in which “they were counting things in five.” Lunden even wrote drafts of a song in which the victims of aphasia struggled with counting. However, Lunden recalled: “We could just never make that song work, and then we decided, ‘what the hell with it, let’s just make it a scene. We don’t need it [the song] anyways.’” The song would have musicalized the neologism and great deal of repetition that characterize aphasic speech. Also, as they are re-learning how to speak, each of the patients speaks with a particular speed and cadence. The song would have to combine four different characters into one song.

Lunden and Pearlman discarded a song for the therapy session scene, but kept Billy’s “Recipe for Cheesecake,” which dramatizes his impaired speech. Thus, Lunden and Pearlman embedded the songs “Let Me Call You Sweetheart” and “Recipe for Cheesecake” in spoken dialogue. Ultimately, by having the characters sing “Let Me Call You Sweetheart” diegetically and speak the rest of the therapy scene until Billy’s song, the creators of Wings emphasize that singing is a separate activity in the brain and is not affected by aphasia, a point that differentiates the musical Wings from Kopit’s original play.

Before Larson composed Mark and Roger’s duet “What Your Own,” which occurs towards the end of Act II of Rent, he conceived three other songs that occupied that spot in the plot: “Open Road,” “U.S of Ease,” and “Real State.” These songs created different situations to dramatize how these two characters finally understand that they must make the most of what they believe in order to succeed professionally and romantically. Larson’s first idea consisted of

55 Jeffrey Lunden, interview by author, New York, NY, June 12, 2015. I attended an aphasia awareness event held at the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine on June 10, 2016 in which I heard lectures and talked to several people with aphasia. I learned firsthand that it is fairly common for someone with aphasia to struggle with counting. In several cases, the person had to re-learn numbers and how to count, and even after practice, they still had a difficult time with numbers. Lunden’s song would have depicted this struggle in Wings.

56 Ibid.
two songs, whose titles appear in his song list dated January 23, 1992: “Open Road” and “Dis-Ease.” In the July 1992 script, Larson included the lyrics for “Open Road, but discarded “Dis-Ease” and added another song titled “U.S. of Ease.”57 Also in this script, Larson created the character of Congressman Otam A. Desnofla, whose character description reads, “Makes Jesse Helms seem like Mario Cuomo.”58 In “U.S. of Ease,” Desnofla is hungry and living in the street since he lost his congressional seat after a photo of him and Angel had been released. Mark and two homeless people (named Rudy and Dogman) join Desnofla in singing how fast life changes because of fickleness in the United States. The song functioned as comic relief after Angel’s funeral and Roger leaving Mimi in “Goodbye Love.”

“Open Road” followed “U.S. of Ease” and depicted Roger driving to Santa Fe and defending why he chose to leave Mimi:

ROGER
No, you can’t save the world.
Better save your heart.
Start to close the door
Look for open road.59

The lyrics foreshadow those that Larson later wrote for “What You Own” and “Your Eyes,” both sung by Roger:

ROGER
No, you won’t forget her eyes
But don’t forget your heart.
Start from points unknown
Take a lighter road.


59 Ibid., 78.
Till you’re on your own,
Till your heart has grown
Till your heart is open
Your heart is open-
You hear is open road.60

Larson did not make a change in this part of the plot until he finalized the October 25, 1994 script for the fall workshop at NYTW. In the September 1, 1994 script, Larson noted the end of “Goodbye Love”: “Insert new hysterically funny song, ‘Real Estate.’”61 By the October script, Larson had replaced Desnofla with “the Man from the Home Office of Blockbuster, Inc.,” whose character description reads: “Good Christian southerner from the home office. Doesn’t say much,” and replaced “U.S. of Ease” with “Real Estate.”62 After Mimi leaves at the end of “Goodbye Love,” Benny and Blockbuster try to convince Mark to join them in a real estate career. The offer moves Mark, who starts to question the rewards of a career as a filmmaker. Benny and Blockbuster invite Mark to consider the benefits of capitalism as a real estate salesperson. Despite the temptation, Mark sings at the end of the song that he cannot consider such a career. Similar to “U.S. of Ease,” “Real Estate” functioned as comic relief before the musical’s denouement. In these 1994 scripts, “Open Road” featured a new middle section in which Roger attempts to call a number (presumably Mimi’s), but the operator says that the number has been disconnected. Larson changed the lyrics of the last three stanzas of the song, and had Roger consider turning around and not leaving.

The scene began to acquire the format that it has in the musical’s final version in the November 1, 1995 script. Larson cut both “Real Estate” and “Open Road” and wrote the

60 Ibid., 79.


dialogue that follows “Goodbye Love” and precedes “What You Own.” The pastor demands that Collins leave because he cannot pay for the Angel’s funeral. Benny offers to help, and Collins tells him that it was Angel who killed his wife’s dog. Benny admits that he always hated the dog. They leave, and Mark goes to work, which segues to the newly composed “What You Own.” Similar to “Open Road,” this song shows Roger going out of town and debating his choices. Larson added Mark to the scene, who claims to “dive into work” in order to forget his problems. “What You Own” shows that both Roger and Mark gradually understand that they are better equipped to face their difficulties in life than fleeing to Santa Fe or selling out to Buzzline. They conclude:

    BOTH.
    When you’re living in America
    At the end of the millennium,
    You’re what you own
    So I own not a motion
    I escape and ape content
    I don’t own emotion—I rent. 63

By the end of the song, Roger decides to return to New York, and Mark quits his job. In the first version of the song, Mark calls his father and asks for a lawyer before quitting his job. The December 19 script features the dramatic action from “Goodbye Love” to the end of “What You Own” as it appears in the final version of the musical. At the climax of “What You Own,” Mark calls Alexi before quitting his the job, not his father. 64 Anthony Rapp, who played Mark in the original production of Rent, wrote in his memoirs that Larson wrote “What You Own” with him and his voice in mind, and after he composed the song, Larson called Rapp and

---


sang the song over the phone. Rapp had been part of Rent since the 1994 fall workshop and helped Larson and Greif develop Mark’s character. Larson may have thought that Mark deserved more introspectiveness that allowed for the growth of the character at the end of the musical and added a duet for him to sing with Roger.

Four songs that Finn composed for A New Brain, “Go Ahead and Eat a Cookie,” “The Walkers Song,” “Where We Can Fly,” and “Anytime (I Am There),” created specific dramatic situations that were not on a par with the rest of the musical’s plot. Without a book per se to prompt dramatic purposes for these songs, Finn and Lapine’s decision to excise them enhanced their agenda of communicating the dramatic action in song. On June 21–29, 1996, Lincoln Center presented a workshop of Finn’s A New Brain. The first three of these cut songs were composed for this workshop. “Anytime (I Am There)” was never included in any official performance of the musical.

“Go Ahead Eat a Cookie” functioned as a flashback from the hospital that dramatized the first scene between Gordon and Roger. Both are in bed, Roger is sleeping, and Gordon debates going to the kitchen to eat a cookie in the middle of the night. His indecision wakes and annoys Roger. Even after Gordon goes to the kitchen and eats a cookie, he does not calm down but moans about his weight gain. This sung-dialogue segued to Roger’s “I’d Rather Be Sailing,” in which he sings how much he enjoys the peacefulness of sailing and how happy he is that he has Gordon waiting when he returns from the ocean.

This scene resembled Marvin and Whizzer in Falsettos. The drama derives from the two men displaying opposing interests and struggle with understanding each other’s tastes and behaviors. The songs “Thrill of First Love” and “The Chess Game” fulfilled such a dramatic

---

purpose in *March of the Falsettos*. The songs “Go Ahead and Eat a Cookie” and “I’d Rather Be Sailing” established this difference in the protagonists of *A New Brain*: Roger is calm and would “rather go sailing,” while Gordon is anxious and impatient. “Go Ahead Eat a Cookie,” however, proved redundant to characterize Gordon because these aspects of his personality had already been outlined in the musical’s prologue. “I’d Rather Go Sailing,” on the other hand, had to remain in this spot of the dramatic action because not only does it introduce Roger (it is his “I Am” song), but it also contrasts him with Gordon.

“The Walkers Song” presented all characters dancing with walkers in Gordon’s imagination. In the workshop script, Finn placed it after Gordon and Roger’s duet “Just Go” and before “Sitting Becalmed in the Lee of Cuttyhunk.” Roger invited Gordon for a walk after “Just Go” and handed him a walker to help. Roger left the scene, and the entire company danced onstage with walkers: “To the left, to the right, to the left, to the right, got a walker up and back, back and forth, walk, walk, walk.” The idea of a walker song originated when Finn was in the hospital with his AVM. Lapine asked Finn to write down the experience from this life-threatening situation so the notes could be turned into songs one day. When he saw Finn with a walker, he said, “good . . . we’ll have a walker song.” However, the song did not add anything to the dramatic action of *A New Brain*, did not inform anything new about Gordon or his condition, and had no connections to any of the other songs. The song was cut for the original production, and “Operation Tomorrow” and a revised “Poor, Unsuccessful, and Fat” took its place.

---

66 Finn and Lapine, *A New Brain* (Workshop), video NCOV 1946, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. The lyrics are transcribed from this video.

In the 1996 workshop script of *A New Brain*, the song “Where We Can Fly” functioned similarly to Mr. Bungee’s “Don’t Give In” in the original production: it bridged Gordon’s hallucination sequence from what happens in reality. Following the mother’s lament in Gordon’s imagination, “The Music Still Plays On,” the introduction of “Where We Can Fly” consisted of a sung-dialogue between one of the nurses and Rhoda explaining that the surgery is complicated, but will result in Gordon’s new brain. Doctor Jafar then sang this gospel hymn-like song as he, doctor Bernstein, and the nurses performed the surgery. The song encouraged Gordon to remain strong and believe that the surgery will lead to a new beginning:

**DR. JAFAR**
Finally this day we will move faster and higher
And this day, we’ll reach the sky
This day we’ve achieved a certain grace
And this is the time and place where we can fly

... Fly out into cloudy skies, we flap our wings
And rise, and rise, and rise.⁶⁸

Rhoda’s cut song “It Ends with Life” followed reporting on the operation’s success and that Gordon will live. Neither “Where We Can Fly” nor “It Ends with Life” dramatized Gordon’s awakening from his hallucinations following the coma. The dramatic action moved from his hallucinating mind, to surgery and its aftermath without providing Gordon’s perspective. Also, the sequence “The Homeless Lady’s Revenge” and “Time” later in the musical depicted Gordon’s understanding that surviving the surgery and acquiring a new brain should be enough for him to begin a new, less stressful life. Thus, the sequence of songs in the 1996 workshop script reflects that Finn’s early version of *A New Brain* focused on aspects of the illness. As it

---

⁶⁸ Finn and Lapine, *A New Brain* (Workshop), video NCOV 1946, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. The lyrics are transcribed from this video.
developed from the workshop to the original production, the musical became “less about a medical ordeal and more about creativity; less about physical than artistic survival.”

The song “Anytime (I Am There)” is a message from someone who died reassuring beloved ones that his or her presence will still be felt in little, everyday activities, regardless of death. Finn wrote that the inspiration for this song was very personal: “While my great friend Monica Andress was dying, she asked me to write a song for her funeral that would make people cry. It’s the only song that, while I was writing it, made me cry endlessly.” Finn initially assigned the song to Roger, but dropped it because the actor was unable to sing it. According to author Stephen Cohen, the song was cut because Roger already had a ballad, “I’d Rather Be Sailing.” Finn tried to give “Anytime” to Gordon to sing on his way to surgery, but Lapine discarded the idea because he concluded that a powerful song like “Anytime” before Gordon’s hallucination sequence, his awakening from coma, and his understanding that the experience grants him a new beginning would cause the musical “to emotionally peak too early.” The plot of the musical did not allow them to move “Anytime” to any other part of the song sequence, and they cut the song altogether. Finn later included it in his 2003 song cycle Elegies.

---

69 Pall, “The Long-Running Musical of William Finn’s Life.”


71 William Finn, interview by author, New York, NY, June 8, 2015. The actor was Christopher Innvar, who left the production weeks after the June 18, 1998 opening and was not contracted to participate in the original cast recording of A New Brain. Norm Lewis sang the role in the recording and played Roger throughout the rest of the run. Harry Haun and David Lefkowitz, “Finn’s New Brain Goes Into Recording Studio with Cast Change, June 29,” http://www.playbill.com/article/finns-new-brain-goes-into-recording-studio-with-cast-change-june-29-com-76253 (accessed October 24, 2015).

In addition to “Just One Day,” discussed above, another song from Lippa’s *The Wild Party* was cut and replaced during the compositional process. Lippa composed the song “Mary Jane” for a workshop that happened in mid-1999. By that point, the first act already featured solo moments for the guests of the party—as opposed to the four leads—to shine (“Old-Fashioned Love Story,” “Wild, Wild Party,” and “Two of a Kind”). Lippa thought that the second act needed songs that would fulfill the same purpose, such as “Jackie’s Last Dance.” He wrote “Mary Jane” for the old prostitute Dolores:

Dolores was a cross-dressing man, so a man dressed as a woman, and it was a moment when he had been sort of humiliated and took off his wig, and sat in a pool of booze, and he was sitting alone and sang about this sad girl he knows. It was a very strange sad song. The guy we casted in the show sang it in falsetto. He had a really high voice. It was a very odd moment. It just didn’t quite work.

Lippa included the song in previews after “The Fight” and before Queenie and Black’s “Come with Me.” Indeed, like “Old-Fashioned Love Story” in Act I, “Mary Jane” shifted the focus away from the protagonists. The song may not have added much to the development of the dramatic action, but this tale of a sad girl could have been interpreted as a comment on Queenie’s story. At the very least, it would have highlighted the eccentricity of Quennie’s guests, which in the original production happened more in Act I than in Act II.

Jason Robert Brown has acknowledged that he began and never finished several songs during the compositional process of *The Last Five Years*. He made several drafts that would

---

73 Andrew Lippa, interview by author, New York, NY, June 20, 2015.

74 Ibid.

75 Lippa considers the song lost.

76 In the 2015 Encores! Off-Center production, Lippa cut “Jackie’s Last Dance,” making Act II center exclusively around the four leads. The guests participated in ensemble numbers only, such as “Let Me Drown” and “Come with Me.”
build up to a full-blown song but never actually did. “If I Didn’t Believe in You” had so many
drafts that it took him seven to eight months to complete. “See I’m Smiling” was another song
that took a great amount of time. However, once he considered a song finished and plotted, it
did not go through great amount of change. Indeed, just one song, Jamie’s first solo in scene 2,
had to be cut and replaced, affecting the presentation of the dramatic action early on in the
musical.

In the 2001 Chicago production of The Last Five Years, Jamie sang “I Could Be in Love
with Someone Like You” in scene 2, whereas in the 2002 New York run the character sang a
new song, “Shiksa Goddess.” The scene introduces the character of Jamie and, in both versions,
dramatizes his excitement for finally dating a girl (Cathy) who is not Jewish. Brown wanted the
song to portray happiness in the first weeks of the relationship through Jamie’s eyes, so it would
contrast with Cathy’s telling, who in scenes 1 and 3 sings about the breakup and the relationship
falling apart.

The choice to change the song altered both Jamie’s and Cathy’s characterization early in
the dramatic action. “I Could Be in Love with Someone Like You” makes clear that Jamie is
Jewish and Cathy is Irish Catholic. The lyrics make various references to Irish culture, including
the four-leave clover, Riverdance, and Irish personalities. In “Shiksa Goddess,” Brown removed
the Irish references, portraying Cathy as a gentile. Jamie sings about upsetting his family for

77 Jason Robert Brown, interview by Patrick Pacheco, February 11, 2013, Works and Process at the
Guggenheim: The Last Five Years, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, New York, NY.

78 Ibid.

79 Shiksa is a Yiddish word that means a gentile girl or woman. The word appeared in the lyrics of “I Could
Be in Love with Someone Like You,” when Jamie sings that he likes “the ancient curse of the shiksa queens.”
his choice and, in the style of a list song, tells her about attributes that could describe her, just as long as she does not bare any Jewish traits:

JAMIE.
If you had a tattoo, that wouldn’t matter.
If you had a shaved head, that would be cool.
If you came from Spain or Japan
Or the back of a van—
Just as long as you’re not from Hebrew School.\(^8^0\)

In the former song, Jamie is not certain how to engage in conversation with Cathy on their first date. He digresses from his point at the beginning of the song, showing that he is nervous and even shy. In “Shiksa Goddess,” he expresses confidence that it is high time he had a relationship with a non-Jewish girl and uses it to flirt with Cathy. As Brown has explained, the first song is about her, the second is about him.\(^8^1\)

Brown was asked to change the number weeks before the New York opening because of his ex-wife’s threat to sue the production. Theresa O’Neill, an Irish Catholic, claimed that Brown’s lyrics were too personal.\(^8^2\) Despite the removal of “I Could Be in Love with Someone Like You,” echoes of the song can still be heard in the musical’s final version. Brown maintained the same beat and very similar rhythm, changing the song’s perspective to create “Shiksa Goddess.” The new song’s final line and musical climax even quotes the title of the original song verbatim. This also happens at the end of two other Jamie’s songs. In scene 6, “The Schmuel Song” ends with him asking Cathy, “Have I mentioned today how lucky I am to be in love with


\(^{8^1}\) Jason Robert Brown, interview by Patrick Pacheco, February 11, 2013.

Scene 13’s song “Nobody Needs to Know” ends with him singing to his new lover, “Since I need to be in love with someone, maybe I could be in love with someone like you.”

Brown has explained that both “I Could Be in Love with Someone Like You” and “Shiska Goddess” were based on Loudon Wainwright’s “Nice Jewish Girls.” Also, Woody Allen and Arthur Miller had their take on the shiksa girl in their own work, and these songs mark Brown’s take.

Shifting the placement of songs does not happen in the sung-through musical only. Traditional book musicals, too, may also have songs shifted or cut or replaced by a newly composed one. Sondheim wrote four different songs for the finale of *Company* (1970), and one of the discarded songs, “Marry Me a Little” was permanently positioned as Act I finale in the musical’s 1995 revival. He also replaced “Can That Boy Foxtrot” with “I’m Still Here” during the composition of *Follies* (1971). John Kander and Fred Ebb’s “Maybe This Time” was included in the 1998 revival of *Cabaret* after the success that the song had achieved in the 1972 film with Liza Minnelli.

Sondheim has explained the genesis of theater songs: “If somebody says write a song about a lady in a red dress crying at the end of a bar, that’s a lot easier than somebody saying...

---


84 Ibid., 59.


write a song about a fellow who’s sorry.” Indeed, the book of a musical provides specific situations that grant the songwriter some freedom to expand the drama employing the partnership between lyrics and music. If Sondheim defends that “content dictates form,” it is because content originates in the book of a musical. In the traditional book musical, spoken dialogue provide the specific set up for a song.

In sung-through musicals, a continuous sequence of songs forms a flexible structure and provides the specifics of dramatic content. By editing songs and shifting their placement the creative team takes advantage of this flexibility to plot the dramatic action. Communicating in song alone has its challenges and limitations, and this chapter has shown how changes made to specific songs in their respective song order can alter the dramatic structure.

---


88 Ibid., 74.
Chapter 6
How Changes Made to Songs’ Order Affect Dramatic Action

The sung-through musical depends on the order of the songs to create plot syntax since dialogue scenes do not occur between songs. The previous two chapters considered how changes made to song content changed and in many cases clarified the selected musicals’ dramatic action. This chapter investigates changes made to the order of songs to create dramaturgy. I demonstrate that shuffling, adding, and deleting several songs that relate to the same plotline changed the linearity of the narrative, produced different versions of the plot, and reflect the composers’ struggles to develop subplots. Changes in music and lyrics were necessary to accommodate songs to new dramatic contexts, but this chapter focuses primarily on the consequences of altering the placement and order of songs. Striking differences in song order occurred during the compositional process of *In Trousers*, *Rent*, and *A New Brain*.

The Three Lives of *In Trousers*

The musical *In Trousers* went through two revisals (1981 and 1985) after its original 1979 production before Finn decided on a final version. Consequently, the compositional process and history of this musical must take into account the changes made from one production to another. The differences between the three productions of *In Trousers* produced different plots of the same story and gave individual songs different dramatic functions. Comparison of these three versions reveals the struggle to conceive a musical that communicates all of its dramatic action in song.

The plot of the original production of *In Trousers* can be divided into six phases (see Table 6.1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phases</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Songs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I.</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1. Marvin’s Giddy Seizures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. How the Body Falls Apart / Your Lips and Me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.</td>
<td>First regression: Marvin’s adolescence</td>
<td>3. How Marvin Eats His Breakfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4. My High School Sweetheart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5. Set Those Sails</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition</td>
<td>Back to the present</td>
<td>6. My Chance to Survive the Night</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.</td>
<td>Second regression: Marvin’s wedding day</td>
<td>7. I Am Wearing a Hat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV.</td>
<td>Marvin meets Whizzer and grows apart from his Wife</td>
<td>8. Breakfast over Sugar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9. Whizzer Going Down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V.</td>
<td>Third regression: Marvin’s adolescence</td>
<td>10. High School Ladies at 5 O’Clock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11. The Rape of Miss Goldberg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Back to IV.</td>
<td>After Marvin meets Whizzer</td>
<td>12. The Nausea before the Game</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13. Love Me for What I Am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI.</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>14. How America Got Its Name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>15. Your Lips and Me (reprise)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>16. Marvin Takes a Victory Shower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>17. Another Sleepless Night</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>18. In Trousers (The Dream)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although Finn changed the order of the songs, added new ones, and deleted others, the 1981 version can be divided into the same six phases (see Table 6.2). An asterisk indicates a new song for that production.

Table 6.2. Song order in *In Trousers*, first revisal, Second Stage, February 12–March 7, 1981.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phases</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Songs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I.</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1. I Can’t Sleep*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Helluva Day*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.</td>
<td>First regression: Marvin’s adolescence</td>
<td>3. How Marvin Eats His Breakfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4. My High School Sweetheart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5. Set Those Sails</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition</td>
<td>Back to the present</td>
<td>6. I Swear I Won’t Ever Again*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.</td>
<td>Second regression: Marvin’s wedding day</td>
<td>7. Rit Tit Tat (Cheer #1)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8. I Am Wearing a Hat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The changes for the 1985 revisal were more substantial than for the 1981 revisal, and this plot—the one Finn decided to be the final version of the musical—can be divided into five phases (see Table 6.3). An asterisk indicates a new song for this 1985 version.

Table 6.3. Song order in *In Trousers*, second revisal, Promenade Theater, March 26–April 7, 1985.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phases</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Songs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I.</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1. In Trousers (The Dream)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. I Can’t Sleep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Helluva Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4. I Have a Family*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.</td>
<td>First regression: Marvin’s adolescence</td>
<td>5. How Marvin Eats His Breakfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6. Marvin’s Giddy Seizures 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7. My High School Sweetheart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8. Set Those Sails</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[9. I Swear I Won’t Ever Again 1]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10. High School Ladies at 5 O’Clock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[11. I Swear I Won’t Ever Again 2]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12. The Rape of Miss Goldberg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition</td>
<td>Back to the present</td>
<td>13. I Swear I Won’t Ever Again 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>14. Love Me for What I Am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.</td>
<td>Second regression: Marvin’s wedding day</td>
<td>15. I Am Wearing a Hat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>16. Wedding Song* 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>17. Three Seconds*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>18. Wedding Song 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV.</td>
<td>Marvin meets Whizzer and grows apart from his Wife</td>
<td>19. How the Body Falls Apart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>20. I Feel Him Slipping Away*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>21. Whizzer Going Down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>22. Marvin’s Giddy Seizures 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Indeed, a key difference between the first two versions and the third one is that the former two had a second regression to Marvin’s adolescence interrupting the fourth phase. The songs “High School Ladies at Five O’Clock” and “The Rape of Miss Goldberg” depicted Marvin’s interest for women when he was fourteen years old. The second of these songs dramatized Marvin coming on to his teacher. In the 1979 and 1981 versions, these songs follow Marvin’s first sexual encounter with another man, “Whizzer Going Down.” In the 1985 version, the regression to adolescence occurs only once, during the second phase of the musical. Finn moved these two songs to this phase and interwove them with sections from “I Swear I Won’t Ever Again,” which shifts the dramatic action momentarily into the present.

Other songs moved between the different phases in each of the versions. Finn kept the music for the songs the same but slightly edited the lyrics to fit the new dramatic context.

“Marvin’s Giddy Seizures” introduces the protagonist, his personality, and the fact that he has not been well recently because of confusion regarding his sexuality. He sings, “Maybe Marvin needs attention of a private sort.” In the original production, Finn put this song as the opening

---

1 In all of the three versions, Miss Goldberg wears a pair of sunglasses throughout the entire performance. “The Rape of Miss Goldberg” consists of Marvin seducing her and removing her sunglasses.

2 Sung-through musicals in the embedded-song structure may make use of the interrupted song technique. “I Swear I Won’t Ever Again” in the 1985 version of In Trousers represents one such example in a sung-through musical structured as a song cycle.

number. For the 1981 version, he composed a new opening song, “I Can’t Sleep,” which focuses more on Marvin’s conflicts than his personality. This new song quoted “Marvin’s Giddy Seizures” at the beginning, but followed with new music and lyrics. Finn moved “Marvin’s Giddy Seizures” to the fourth phase of the musical, following the wedding regression. Marvin’s giddy seizures now refer to his feelings in a phase of the dramatic action that explores how he and his wife grew apart during their marriage. In the third version, Finn broke the song into two parts and inserted each part in different phases of the plot. The first part occurs during the adolescence regression, helping to characterize him as an anxious and spoiled teenager. The second part happens in the fourth phase, before his wife sings about her own giddy seizures and her marriage falling apart in “I’m Breaking Down.”

In the first two versions, “Love Me for What I Am” occurred after the second adolescent regression and before the denouement of the musical in “How America Got Its Name.” The wife sings this ballad to remember “the time she met her husband.”\(^4\) The song reveals how she had insecurities regarding her relationship with Marvin since the beginning. “Love Me for What I Am” depicts that the marriage had never been a resolute choice for either party, but the wife believed that Marvin could love “someone imperfectly me.”\(^5\) In the 1985 version, Finn made it part of the transition from phase II to III. Since the wife sings about the time she and Marvin met, it now segues into the wedding regression. In this context the wife’s insecurities reveal her youth and uncertainty about getting married, while still believing that Marvin would accept her.

“How the Body Falls Apart” provides a comment on the action by the three ladies. The lyrics reflect on the fact that undesirable changes occur over the years, and “things on which we

\(^4\) Ibid., 48.

\(^5\) Ibid., 50.
must depend seem to fail us in the end.” Finn originally made this the second number, informing the audience right away that Marvin and his wife’s relationship has not been on good terms. The wife’s solo “Your Lips and Me” followed, in which she described how Marvin’s recent behavior had affected their marriage. In the 1981 version, Finn cut “How the Body Falls Apart” altogether and introduced a new marital crisis song, “A Helluva Day.” Although he cut the ladies’ commentary song, he included them to sing back-up vocals. In the 1985 version, Finn kept “Helluva Day” and reinstated “How the Body Falls Apart,” but now at the beginning of the fourth phase. As “How the Body Falls Apart” segues from the wedding day to how Marvin and his wife grow apart, the song comments on the action, suggesting that time passes and undesirable changes take their toll.

Finn’s shuffling of the title song, “In Trousers (The Dream),” demonstrates that its position in the plot—and even its absence thereof—affected the dramatic action. In the first production of the musical, Finn chose this song to be the last number because the dream that Marvin sings about represents his conclusion that once only women participated in his love life, but after examining his adolescence and latest discoveries as a young adult, only those in trousers, an euphemism for men, can take part in his private life. The song features a four-measure ostinato that underscores Marvin’s singing and brings both the song and the musical to an end. The first two measures of the ostinato are in C minor and the next two move to A-flat major. The syncopation in the ostinato’s melody contrasts with the regularity of the bass line, musically reflecting the challenge of accommodating one’s sexual orientation in a straight society.

---

6 Ibid., 57.

7 William Finn, telephone interview by author, October 22, 2015.
The second version of the musical eliminated “In Trousers (The Dream)” altogether. It opened with a brand new song, “I Can’t Sleep,” in which Marvin admits that his sleeping has been affected by fantasies that he has had concerning men. The fact that Marvin cannot sleep explains why a song about a dream had to be cut. Finn composed a new song to conclude the musical, “Goodnight,” in which Marvin bids the women in his life goodbye and admits to being changed:

MARVIN
Goodbye. So long to the ladies.
My symptoms of doubt seem insincere.
In their arms I’d fear
I’d lie alone.
I swore I would not again,
Not dally with other men.
Okay, so I lied but then,
I’ve grown. 8

Marvin acknowledges his involvement with men, but the trousers euphemism remains solely in the musical’s title and is not explained in any of the songs. The absence of “In Trousers (The Dream)” makes this version of the musical focus more on how Marvin comes out than on his sexual orientation. 9

The final version of the musical reintroduced a section of “In Trousers (The Dream)” at the very beginning. Marvin does not sing about women being gone from his life, but how he has been thinking more frequently about those in trousers. Stage directions read that the three ladies should be dressed as men in trousers during this song and remove them to reveal their dresses

---

8 William Finn, *In Trousers* (typescript, 1981), MS RM 1933, Performing Arts Research Collection – Theatre, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York. Some of these lyrics are handwritten in the manuscript. Finn rewrote them for the 1985 version of *In Trousers.*

9 In my interviews with Finn, he could not remember the reason why “In Trousers (The Dream)” was cut for the 1981 production. He supposes that he was asked to cut it, for he cuts songs only when a director asks. (William Finn, telephone interview by author, October 22, 2015).
only after the song is over.\textsuperscript{10} Finn also included excerpts of “Marvin’s Giddy Seizures” and wrote a new three-part harmony section in which the ladies (dressed as men) sing Marvin’s name, reminiscent of how Bobby’s friends sing his name in the opening of Stephen Sondheim’s \textit{Company} (1970). All of this happens above that four-measure ostinato and segues into the song “I Can’t Sleep.” “In Trousers (The Dream)” explains the musical’s title and introduces the reason why Marvin struggles with insomnia.

The conclusion of this final version, however, has complicated the history and denouement of the musical. The song “Goodnight” was used to bring the show to a close, but Finn incorporated a new song, “No Hard Feelings,” in the middle of “Goodnight” for the ladies to sing their goodbye back to Marvin. This new song consists just of the ladies singing the words of the title in harmony. They reprise eight measures from “Marvin’s Giddy Seizures,” and Marvin concludes the song and the musical with a return to “Goodnight.” A complete version of “In Trousers (The Dream)” was not reprised at the end because Finn and director Matt Casella believed that “Goodnight” had more potential as a ballad that could succeed commercially out of the dramatic context of the musical than “In Trousers (The Dream).”\textsuperscript{11} When Finn decided that this third version of the musical would be definitive, he added the entire song “In Trousers (The Dream)” as an alternative ending to “Goodnight/No Hard Feelings.” In the published book of \textit{In Trousers}, Finn added, “The author prefers this ending.”\textsuperscript{12} In his review of this production, Frank Rich wrote that the musical “seems less the tale of a man facing traumatic choices than that of an irresponsible cad who toys destructively with his wife and child for self-indulgent


\textsuperscript{11} William Finn, telephone interview by author, October 22, 2015.

\textsuperscript{12} Finn, \textit{In Trousers}, 85.
If the title song had appeared at the end of the musical, perhaps Rich’s critique would have been less harsh, for it would have provided a window into Marvin’s inner thoughts; such an insight is conspicuously lacking in “Goodnight/No Hard Feelings.”

Finn also altered the phases of the musical in each version by adding new songs. “I Can’t Sleep” replaced “Marvin’s Giddy Seizures” as the opening number in 1981. “I Have a Family,” in the 1985 version, gave Marvin an opportunity to sing about his ambivalence between having a traditional family while thinking, “in my mind I’m kissing men.” “I Have a Family” qualifies as an “I Am” song that Marvin lacked in the previous two versions of In Trousers, and one that foreshadows Marvin’s “A Tight-Knit Family” in March of the Falsettos. The two parts of “Wedding Song” and Marvin’s “Three Seconds” in the 1985 version dramatized the wedding, which in previous versions occurred through Miss Goldberg and the high school sweetheart’s narration in “I Am Wearing a Hat.” “Wedding Song” dramatizes the wedding, while “Three Seconds” reveals what goes on inside Marvin’s mind as he is about to say “I do.” Finally, the third version also expanded the fourth phase of the musical by adding the wife’s “I Feel Him Slipping Away” and giving Marvin a chance to reflect on his choice of leaving her (“Packing Up”).

By the same token, Finn altered the dramatic action by cutting songs from different phases. Finn replaced the wife’s first soliloquy song “Your Lips and Me” with “Helluva Day” in the 1981 and 1985 versions. “Cheer #1” and “Cheer #2” in the 1981 version marked two moments in which the high school sweetheart performed cheerleader dance moves commenting

---


14 Finn, The Marvin Songs, 16.
on the action. The first commented on Marvin finding someone to marry him; the second commented on his divorce. These “Cheers” provided the actress playing the sweetheart more solo numbers than in the original production, but they were evidently ineffective, for Finn cut them altogether in the 1985 version.

“The Nausea before the Game” was Marvin’s perspective on married life and his duties as a husband. In the first two productions, Finn paired it with the wife’s “Love Me for What I Am.” In the 1985 version, he moved the wife’s number to be performed before the wedding and cut “The Nausea before the Game.” The new “Packing Up” allowed Marvin to sing about these difficulties with different lyrics. Finally, “Marvin Takes a Victory Shower” dramatized his relief in the last phase of the musical for coming to terms with his sexual orientation. The dramatic action comprised the ladies “behind Marvin on chairs, showering him with watering cans.”

Since the lyrics consisted of nothing more than narrating the action with “scrubby dubby dubby, look at Marvin take a shower, look at Marvin in the tubby, scrubby dubby dubby,” Finn deleted it for the 1985 version.

The Mark-Maureen-Joanne plot in Rent

The characters Mark, Maureen, and Joanne form a plotline in Rent that develops throughout the musical. The first song informs that Mark and Maureen used to be a couple, but

---


17 Ibid.

18 Despite extensive rewriting, some songs from *In Trousers* remained in the same phase of the dramatic action in all versions: “My High School Sweetheart,” “How Marvin Eats His Breakfast,” “Set Those Sails,” “I Am Wearing a Hat,” “Breakfast Over Sugar,” “How America Got Its Name,” and “Another Sleepless Night.”
she broke up with him to start a relationship with another woman, Joanne. The main drama of this plotline concerns Joanne struggling with Maureen’s eccentric behavior and Maureen coming to terms with Joanne’s jealousy. Mark observes the ups and downs of their relationship, while maintaining a friendly relationship with both Maureen and Joanne. Maureen’s protest gives Mark notoriety as a videographer. Throughout the musical, Mark and Maureen do not show feelings or resentment to one another; and Mark and Joanne grow closer as both share the turbulent experience of dating Maureen. It took Larson several songs to create and develop this plotline. The amount of rewriting and song shifting for these three characters over the course of seven years chart Larson’s struggle to conceive it.

In Billy Aronson’s scripts, this was a subplot that followed the structure of *La Bohème*. Suzanne and Martin (the counterparts of Musetta and Alcindoro) walk in and sit at a table next to Mark, while he is at a restaurant with his friends. Suzanne sings a song that humiliates Martin and seduces Mark. Later in the play, Mark and Suzanne live together, but have a fight after Ralph and Mimi have theirs. Aronson’s ending for *Rent* focused on Mimi and Ralph and provided no resolution for Mark and Suzanne.19

After Larson started working on the musical by himself in 1991, he renamed the characters Maureen and Joanne and made them lesbians. The first song that he considered for this plotline was “You’ll Never Change,” which appears in a song outline dated March 4, 1992.20 I have not been able to locate the lyrics or music for this song, but Larson indicated its dramatic function. In the song’s first part, it would have dramatized the following: “On their way to the


[Life Support] meeting, Mark and others encounter Maureen and Joanne. Maureen can’t get her sound equipment to work [for her protest performance]—asks Mark’s help. They exchange heated barbs, he exits.”\textsuperscript{21} Later in the act, the song’s second part would have dramatized a scene in which “Mark returns alone to fix the sound system.”\textsuperscript{22} In this same song outline, Larson saved a spot for a love song for Maureen and Mark in Act II to parallel Marcello and Musetta in \textit{La Bohème}.

For the complete script of July 1992, Larson changed his mind. “You’ll Never Change” does not appear, but Larson composed three new songs for these characters. The first, titled “Female to Female,” depicts a bossy Maureen treating Joanne like Musetta treats Alcindoro. It recounts the problems with digital delay in Maureen’s equipment and Joanne’s struggle to satisfy Maureen. Larson also composed “Male to Female” for Mark and Maureen to sing. It has a similar structure as “Female to Female” with a sung dialogue exchange. The third song for this plotline was “You Were Right,” another duet for Mark and Maureen. This was a list song in which one tells the other about something past that turned out to be true:

\begin{quote}
MAUREEN. You were right about my mother.
MARK. You’ll never learn.
MAUREEN. When you said that my head distrusted my heart.
MARK. When you said that I was dead without my art.
BOTH. I couldn’t hear it somehow. Why is it clear to me now?
MARK. You were right about the Simpsons.
MAUREEN. You were right about Kurt Weill.
MARK. You were right about the Hamptons. They’re vile.\textsuperscript{23}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
Mark and Maureen realize they were compatible but seem appreciate why they broke up. Joanne enters at the end of the song and sees them breaking their embrace. This song and scene was kept for the 1993 reading script.24

Larson changed this plotline in the July 1994 script, when he was preparing Rent for its fall workshop. He moved parts of “Female to Female” into the opening song “Rent.” What was not used in “Rent” appeared in “Female to Female” as an independent song, with some additional lyrics. Larson moved it to occur later in Act I, after Mimi and Roger meet for the first time. In the 1992 and 1993 scripts, the song took place before the main couple met. “Male to Female” appeared in the script just as it had been in 1992 and 1993. “You Were Right” had some modifications in the lyrics, which revealed more about Mark and Maureen’s relationship than “Male to Female,” and its lyrics were wittier than before.25

In the September 1, 1994 script, Larson rewrote the sung-dialogue excerpt from “Female to Female” that appears in the middle of “Rent.” Also, this script contains just the first page of “You Were Right” and several handwritten pages with the lyrics for a new song for Mark and Maureen, titled “Over It.”26 For the October 25, 1994 workshop script, “Female to Female” and “Male to Female” occur as in the September script. “You Were Right” was cut and replaced by “Over It.” This new song still dramatized Mark fixing the cables for Maureen’s performance, but now he sings that being a lesbian is just a phase that Maureen will soon get over. The lyrics for “Over It” make Maureen more mature and decided about her sexuality than any previous song


that Larson had composed for the character. She disagrees with Mark, but they finish the song on good terms. Joanne enters but does not see them embracing.27

The extensive rewriting process of 1995 and the help of playwright Lynn Thompson brought significant changes to this plotline, as documented in the September 12, 1995 script. “Female to Female” and “Male to Female” were cut. “Over It” was moved to earlier in Act I and was now sung by Joanne and Mark. She is trying to figure out the cables for Maureen’s performance (Larson entered her line “I went to Harvard for this,” which remained in the musical until the final version), and Mark arrives thinking Maureen would be there. Four pages of this script are missing, preventing a comparison of “Over It” with Mark and Maureen’s number in the 1994 scripts. Larson also included a solo song for Joanne, “We’re Okay.” She talks on the phone to Maureen, who has not been introduced yet, and is jealous that Maureen happens to be in the same place as an attractive model. Larson divided the Act II song “Contact” (composed for the July 1992 script) in two parts, interrupted by Maureen and Joanne’s new song, “Love of My Life.” Similar to “You Were Right,” this list song is modeled on Cole Porter’s “You’re the Top”:

MAUREEN.
You’re the bad review on my opening night
You’re the turbulence on my flight
You’re the chip on my front tooth
You’re the vacancy sign on my ticket booth
You’re the sand in my bikini
You’re the end of my Martini.

I can never get through to your head
And for you I have cried and I’ve bled
You’re a wonk and a snob but in bed
You’re the love of my life.28


For the November 1, 1995 script, Larson composed a new song for Mark and Joanne, “Tango: Maureen.” It uses the opening vamp and dialogue from “Over It,” but segues into new lyrics and music. The dramatic action still features Mark fixing the cables for Maureen’s performance, but now he and Joanne sing about their shared experience of being in a relationship with Maureen. In this initial version of the song, Joanne asks Mark several times if he is done, and the humor results from the ambiguity between being done with the cables or telling her about Maureen. Larson retained “Love of My Life” between the two parts of “Contact.”

For the rehearsal script (December 19, 1995), Larson retained “Tango: Maureen.” He cut “Love of My Life” and no longer broke “Contact” into two parts. Larson noted, “Here is where the boffo number will go for Maureen (w/Joanne) by the end of the tune, they’ve broken up.” This new song would follow “Happy New Year,” which had been composed for the September 12, 1995 script. Since this script, “Happy New Year” had been followed by a reprise of “Seasons of Love” and then “Without You.” Larson wanted a song to take place some months after New Year’s Eve, around the time of Valentine’s Day, and this humorous number for Maureen and Joanne would fulfill the purpose.

A song list dated January 11, 1996 includes Maureen and Joanne’s new duet, “Take Me or Leave Me.” The song’s complete lyrics appear in the January 16, 1996 script (nine days


31 Larson entered the song “Valentine’s Day” (composed in 1987) in the same spot in 1992, and it remained there even after several drafts of the script between 1992 and 1995. Larson omitted it in the September 12, 1995 script, when he wrote “Happy New Year.” “Valentine’s Day” was sung by Roger, Mimi, and Joanne.

before previews were scheduled to begin).³³ Both women sing that they cannot change who they are and the other one has either to accept it or to leave it. Unlike “Love of my Life,” this is not a list song, and the character-driven lyrics reveal Larson’s growing mastery of musical theater songwriting.

In the final version, Mark and Maureen do not sing together. They sing to each other in ensemble numbers, such as “Happy New Year” and the Finale, but they do not have a duet. Joanne, perhaps the character that Larson struggled the most to conceive and develop, ended up with a solo song (“We’re Okay”), a duet with Mark (“Tango: Maureen”), and a duet with Maureen (“Take Me or Leave Me”). The changes that Larson made in 1995 and 1996 to enhance Joanne’s character and decrease the tensions between Mark and Maureen made this plotline stronger than it had been between 1992 and 1994. As actress Shelley Dickinson, who played Joanne in the 1994 workshop put it: “Joanne seemed like she was nothing better than a lapdog. At least in the final incarnation she has an identity: she’s an attorney, she has parents who are well-to-do; you understand she’s an intelligent person who is a lesbian, who fell in love with this woman who’s maybe just a little bit kooky and different from anything Joanne’s probably seen in her life.”³⁴

**Mark’s Plot Hole in Rent**

Larson’s song shuffling during the compositional process of *Rent* created a plot hole in the musical’s final version. It concerns Mark’s presence in the loft during the first half of Act I.

---


In “Tune Up #3,” Mark leaves the loft to help Maureen with the equipment for her protest. He tells Roger, “Maureen calls” (her phone call to him had occurred in the middle of the opening song, “Rent”). Mark’s departure from the loft in “Tune Up #3” allows Roger to be alone and sing his solo “One Song Glory” and the meeting song with Mimi (“Light My Candle”). However, Mark inexplicably appears again in the loft when Collins and Angel arrive four songs later in “Today 4 U.” Mark welcomes Collins and even introduces him to the audience before the song begins: “Enter Tom Collins, computer genius, teacher, vagabond anarchist who ran naked through the Parthenon.”

This order of the songs fails to explain how, when, or why Mark returned to the loft. One could guess that he went to help Maureen during the time Roger and Mimi met and got back before Collins and Angel arrive in “Today 4 U.” However, at the end of the following song, “You’ll See,” when Collins invites Mark to join him and Angel in the life support group meeting, Mark says, “First I’ve got a protest to save.” Indeed, he then goes help Maureen and runs into Joanne during the song “Tango: Maureen.” The order of the songs in different scripts and changes that Larson made to them explain how this plot hole occurred.

In Larson’s first complete script (July 1992), he modeled this scene after La Bohème’s first act. Collins and Angel arrive at the loft before Roger and Mimi’s scene. The song “Today 4 U” happens before Roger’s “Right Brain” (a contrafactum of “One Song Glory”) and the duet

---


36 Ibid., 25. Stage directions specify that “Today 4 U” happens in “Mark and Roger’s loft.”

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid., 31.

39 Since the plotline involving Mark, Maureen, and Joanne is strikingly different in Aronson’s 1989 and 1990 scripts, I do not consider them here. I focus on the scripts that Larson penned himself.
with Mimi. Mark stays in the loft until Collins and Angel arrive, and the three go out together afterwards, leaving Roger alone in the loft. Larson even wrote the song “He Says” to dramatize their departure from the loft and Mark explaining to Angel and Collins that Roger insists on staying at home and not interacting with others because he is HIV positive. Larson kept this song order for the reading script of 1993. For the July 1994 script and fall workshop, he wrote a new song for Mark and Roger that preceded “Today 4U,” titled “Cool/ Fool.” The roommates discussed Mark’s reluctance to have an HIV test and Roger’s refusal to leave the loft to see Maureen’s protest.

In the September 12, 1995 script, Larson moved Collins and Angel’s arrival to happen after Roger and Mimi’s meeting scene. Mark’s presence in “Today 4 U” did not create a plot hole because Larson moved the action of this song to happen in the street, where Mark runs into Collins and Angel. Collins and Angel accompany Mark to help Maureen, but leave them alone once they arrive, making room for Mark and Maureen’s duet “Over It.” In the November 1 script, “Today 4 U” still happened in the street, but Larson expanded the dialogue between Mark and Collins before the song. They talk about Roger’s refusal to leave the loft, information that had to be added because “He Says” had already been cut in the September script.

---


41 Larson, Script, Box 13, Folder 3, Jonathan Larson Papers, Library of Congress.


A combination of changes made in the December 19, 1995 rehearsal script and the Off-Broadway run in January 1996 reveals the origin of the plot hole. In the rehearsal script, Mark enters the loft with Collins as they sing the introduction of “Today 4 U.” The dramatic action does not specify how or where they met, or where Mark was during Roger and Mimi’s candle scene. Larson composed “You’ll See” for this script and entered Mark’s line “I have a protest to save,” because Mark had not previously mentioned helping Maureen. Changes for the Off-Broadway run widened the plot hole. “Tune Up #3” was added for Mark to explain Roger’s past to the audience, but it also has him informing Roger that he needs to leave because “Maureen calls.” Larson did not cut Mark’s line in “You’ll See,” making the character state twice that he is leaving to help Maureen. Thus, the December 19, 1995 script created a small plot hole that failed to specify Mark’s action between songs. Although “Tune Up #3” provides context for Roger’s conflict, it complicated Mark’s position by having him state that he is leaving, which is soon contradicted by his presence in “Today 4 U” and repeated in “You’ll See.” Had Larson revisited past drafts and scripts, he might have realized that simply moving “One Song Glory” and “Light My Candle” to after Mark, Collins, and Angel leave at the end of “Today 4 U” would have filled this plot hole.

**Song Order in A New Brain**

The song order in Finn’s *A New Brain* went through several changes between the June 21–29, 1996 workshop and the 1998 original Off-Broadway production. In both versions, the musical’s song sequence breaks the dramatic action in three phases (see Tables 6.4 and 6.5).

---

Table 6.4. Song order in *A New Brain*, workshop, Clark Studio Theatre, Lincoln Center Institute, June 21–29, 1996.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phases</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Songs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| I.     | Gordon’s collapse  | 1. Calamari  
2. Heart and Music |
| II.    | Gordon’s treatment | 3. Mother’s Gonna Make Things Fine  
4. Go Ahead Eat a Cookie / I’d Rather Be Sailing  
5. The X-Rays Disconcert  
6. Gordo’s Law of Genetics  
7. And They’re Off  
8. Roger Has Arrived  
9. Just Go  
10. The Walkers Song  
11. Sitting Becalmed in the Lee of Cuttyhunk  
12. Change  
13. In the Middle of the Room  
14. Poor, Unsuccessful, and Fat/Thin  
15. Patient Relapses  
16. Throwing Out the Books  
17. What We Hoped Wouldn’t Burst Burst  
18. A Really Lousy Day in the Universe  
19. Brain Dead  
20. Whenever I Dream  
21. Eating Myself Up Alive  
22. The Music Still Plays On  
23. Where We Can Fly  
24. It Ends with Life  
25. The Shower Scene |
| III.   | Gordon’s recovery  | 26. On the Street  
27. Time  
28. Heart and Music (reprise)  
29. I Feel So Much Spring |

Table 6.5. Song order in *A New Brain*, original production, Lincoln Center Theater at the Mitzi E. Newhouse, June 18–October 11, 1998.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phases</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Songs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| I.     | Gordon’s collapse  | 1. Prologue:  
Frogs Have So Much Spring  
Calamari  
911 Emergency  
2. Heart and Music |
| II.    | Gordon’s treatment | 3. Trouble in His Brain  
4. Mother’s Gonna Make Things Fine  
5. Be Polite to Everyone  
6. I’d Rather Be Sailing  
7. Family History  
8. Gordo’s Law of Genetics  
9. And They’re Off  
10. Roger Arrives  
11. Just Go  
12. Poor, Unsuccessful and Fat  
13. Operation Tomorrow  
14. Sitting Becalmed in the Lee of Cuttyhunk |
The middle phase explores Gordon’s relationship with his mother, his friend Rhoda, boyfriend Roger, and his frustrations with his job while he is being treated in the hospital and waiting for surgery. Finn’s alterations to the song order between the 1996 workshop and the original production brought significant changes to the development of the dramatic action in this phase of the musical. The songs concerning Gordon’s personal relationships remained the same but the songs concerning the medical interventions and explanations of the protagonist’s condition changed.

In both the 1996 workshop and original production, Finn included four songs for the doctors and nurses. Table 6.4 lists the song order for the workshop script of A New Brain. One of these four songs happened early (song 5), while the other three towards the end of the musical’s middle phase (songs 15, 17, and 24). In the original production (Table 6.5), these songs were replaced with four new ones, the first of which still happens early (song 3), but the other three are spread out in the middle of the phase II (songs 7, 13, and 15).

“The X-Rays Disconcert” marked the first song in the workshop script about Gordon’s health problems. Doctors Jafar and Bernstein, pointing to a poster of the human skull and brain...
and some x-rays of Gordon’s head, explained his condition to his mother and Rhoda. In fast-moving sung-dialogue, the doctors discuss the large amount of fluid on Gordon’s brain that prevents him from talking clearly and walking well, so the brain must be drained. The nurse Richard enters and asks everyone to leave so Gordon can relax, since “he must be at his best, operation tomorrow.” One of the doctors asks Gordon and his mother about their family medical history. The doctor goes through a list of diseases, to which the entire company always replies, “you had it.” “Patient Relapses” featured the entire cast narrating Gordon’s brain bleeding. “What We Hoped Wouldn’t Burst Burst” presents another sung dialogue in which one of the doctors explains that Gordon needs surgery to save his brain. Finally, “It Ends with Life” consists of Rhoda reporting to the audience that the surgery was successful.

Short passages in the middle of other songs in the workshop script helped contextualize Gordon’s health issues. The introduction of “Sitting Becalmed in the Lee of Cuttyhunt” features the doctor explaining to Gordon’s mother that the brain has been drained, and he now needs an MRI so the doctors can see what is wrong. The introduction of “In the Middle of the Room” features the doctor saying that Gordon does not have a tumor, but a bubble in his brain that can burst and bleed at any point.

For the original production of *A New Brain*, Finn composed four new songs related to Gordon’s medical condition that re-structured and enhanced this part of the dramatic action: “Trouble in His Brain,” “Family History,” “Operation Tomorrow,” and “Craniotomy.” Finn cut “The X-Rays Disconcert” and assigned the action to the new songs. “Trouble in His Brain”

---

46 William Finn and James Lapine, *A New Brain* (Workshop), video NCOV 1946, Performing Arts Research Collections, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Billy Rose Theater Division, New York. Lyrics have been transcribed from this video.

47 Ibid.
occupies the same spot that “The X-Rays” did in the workshop script: a single doctor explains Gordon’s condition to his mother and Rhoda.\(^{48}\) Now Gordon, too, hears the doctor’s prognosis. However, Finn restricted the song to the presence of fluid in Gordon’s brain and the need for drainage. Also, Finn moved the songs that introduce Gordon’s relationship with his mother (“Mother’s Gonna Make Things Fine”) and with his boyfriend (“I’d Rather Be Sailing”), both of which occurred before the medical explanation in the workshop script, to after “Trouble in His Brain.” Thus, these two songs acquire a new dramatic context and function: Gordon first understands the unpredictability of his situation and then reevaluates his relationship with the two most important people in his life.\(^{49}\)

The song “Family History” fulfills the same dramatic function that in the workshop script belonged to the second half of “The X-Rays Disconcert.” The nurses ask Gordon and his mother to provide their medical family history. The list of diseases that the doctor went through in “The X-Rays” is now just spoken by the mother as she checks them off the list.\(^{50}\)

The addition of “Operation Tomorrow” created confusion in the development of the dramatic action. The line “operation tomorrow” derived from Richard’s line in “The X-Rays Disconcert,” mentioned above. It was out of place in that song because the doctors still did not know what was wrong with Gordon’s brain and had not even mentioned the possibility of surgery. Finn and Lapine tried to fix the problem in the original production by turning the line into the song “Operation Tomorrow,” which bridges Gordon and Roger’s duet “Just Go” and the________________

\(^{48}\) In the workshop script, the physicians were named Dr. Jafar and Dr. Bernstein. In the original production, Finn named the one physician Dr. Jafar Berenstein.

\(^{49}\) Finn and Lapine made considerable changes to the song order of \textit{A New Brain} for the 2015 New York City Center’s summer series Encores! Off-Center production (June 24–27, 2015). They moved “Mother’s Gonna Make Things Fine” before “Trouble in His Brain.”

\(^{50}\) William Finn and James Lapine, \textit{A New Brain} (New York: Samuel French, 1999), 22.
relocated “Poor, Unsuccessful, and Fat.” After the duet, Richard enters and announces that Gordon needs sleep. However, he does not sing that an operation will happen the next day, but instead, “MRI is tomorrow.” Thus, the title of the new song does not comport with the content of its lyrics. “Operation Tomorrow” marks the only reference to MRI before Gordon goes through this process in “Sitting Becalmed in the Lee of Cuttyhunk.”

The doctor reporting the MRI results, which in the workshop occurred in the introduction of “In the Middle of the Room,” became the song “Craniotomy” in the original production. The doctor and one of the nurses explain that Gordon has Arterial Venous Malformation and review the possible consequences of surgery. The doctor asks Gordon to decide whether to have surgery. The new character of the minister tells Gordon that he should take the risk of surgery. “Craniotomy” also fulfills the same purpose that the cut song “What We Hoped Wouldn’t Burst Burst” did in the workshop. Nurse Nancy sings to Gordon: “Veins in the brains are like balloons filled with water. Sometimes they burst if worse comes to worst, which unfortunately yours did.”

These new songs enhanced the musical’s song order because they provide context and dramatic purpose for songs related to Gordon’s personal matters to occur, which lacked in the workshop. “Family History” triggers Gordon to reflect on his family, which he does in “Gordo’s Law of Genetics” and “And They’re Off.” “Operation Tomorrow” introduces an MRI into the plot, a process dramatized in “Sitting Becalmed in the Lee of Cuttyhunk.”

51 Ibid., 33.
52 Finn also added the line “operation tomorrow” for the mother to sing in the new song “An Invitation to Sleep in My Arms,” which precedes the operation day.
53 For the 2015 Encores! Off-Center revisal, Finn and Lapine changed the title of “Operation Tomorrow” to “MRI Tomorrow.”
54 Finn and Lapine, A New Brain, 40.
explains the surgery and its possible fatal consequence, which causes Gordon to put his career and songwriting skills into perspective. When Mr. Bungee requests a new song (despite Gordon’s unstable condition), Gordon realizes that this might be his last song ever and decides to compose it in “An Invitation to Sleep in My Arms.” The song order created for the original production turned the revue-like script of the workshop into a well-structured musical, one whose sung-through structure successfully balances Gordon’s life-threatening condition with his personal relationships involving his mother and boyfriend, and career choices.

**Songs for Mr. Bungee in *A New Brain***

The plot involving the influence of Gordon’s boss, Mr. Bungee, on the protagonist resulted in several new songs. Lapine’s creation and addition of Mr. Bungee distinguishes the plot of the original production from that of the workshop. This aspect of *A New Brain*’s compositional process is similar to Lapine’s creation of Jason, Marvin’s son, in *March of the Falsettos*: Lapine created the dramatic situations for the new character and asked Finn to compose songs that would fulfill specific dramatic functions. Comparing the workshop script with that from the original production reveals how Finn’s songs for Mr. Bungee affected the song order and dramatic action.

Lapine introduced Mr. Bungee early on in the plot, therefore, the second song of the musical, “Calamari,” had to be rewritten. In both versions of the script, this song dramatizes Gordon meeting his friend Rhoda for lunch, during which they discuss his recent struggles with composition and he collapses “face first into the food.” In the workshop the song developed thus: they read the menu, the waitress sings that calamari is the special of the day and takes the

---

Ibid., 11.
order, they talk, they start eating, and Gordon faints. In the original production, the song accommodated references to Mr. Bungee and the impact that he has on Gordon’s stress. The waitress overhears Gordon and Rhoda talking about Mr. Bungee and realizes that Gordon writes songs for his TV show. She sings the specials like an audition to impress Gordon, and the word calamari is overemphasized.56 Also, Mr. Bungee appears during Gordon and Rhoda’s conversation. When Gordon says that he struggles with composing for Mr. Bungee, he asks Rhoda, “I feel like I’m having hallucinations . . . he’s not here, is he?”57 Mr. Bungee, in Gordon’s imagination, sings a new stanza about his own meanness, while the waitress sings how much she likes Mr. Bungee as she delivers the order. Mr. Bungee also interjects spoken lines during Rhoda’s pep talk to Gordon.58

Some of the songs that occur during the musical’s second phase reveal Gordon’s relationship with his mother and boyfriend. Finn composed “Be Polite to Everyone” to further Gordon’s association with Mr. Bungee in the original production. This song depicts that what goes on inside Gordon’s mind affects what actually happens. Mr. Bungee sings in a didactic tone, as if performing in his TV show, and instructs Gordon to be polite to people, “except all your nearest and your dearest.”59 Simultaneously, Gordon’s mother offers her help, and Gordon is rude to her. Finn’s stage directions specify that the song dramatizes “where Gordon sees and responds to Mr. Bungee, and his mother thinks Gordon is talking to her.”60 One might consider

56 Ibid., 8–9.
57 Ibid., 10.
58 Finn and Lapine rewrote the opening of the musical for the 2015 Encores! Off-Center revisal. They cut “Calamari,” and Gordon and Rhoda meet in Gordon’s house and talk by the piano. The waitress’s music as she served the food was given to Gordon to sing how much he hates Mr. Bungee.
59 Finn and Lapine, A New Brain, 20.
60 Ibid.
this a song that Gordon himself composed for Mr. Bungee to sing in his show and now plays slightly altered in his head.

The workshop version did not include Gordon debating over the last song that he could compose in case the surgery is fatal. He sang “In the Middle of the Room,” which depicted his fear and anxiety before the surgery, and this segued to his sponge bath in “Poor, Unsuccessful, and Fat/Thin” and his relapse. For the original production, Finn and Lapine created two new songs about Gordon’s last song. Lapine conceived the part of the dramatic action when Mr. Bungee demands that Gordon compose a new song for his show. Gordon dismisses his mother, Roger, and Rhoda, and chooses to stay alone in his hospital room to compose his last song. Finn organized all this dramatic action in the new song “An Invitation to Sleep in My Arms.”

Gordon’s song, “Yes,” transitions the action from Gordon composing it to Mr. Bungee singing it and hating it. Gordon fails to satisfy his boss, who finishes “Yes” proclaiming that his own son will write a new song for the show.

Mr. Bungee also plays an important role in the aftermath of Gordon’s surgery. In both versions, several songs dramatize Gordon’s hallucinations during the time he is in a coma, and they all involve the people around him: “Brain Dead” (with Roger), “Whenever I Dream” (with Rhoda), “Eating Myself Up Alive” (with Richard, the nurse), and “The Music Still Plays On” (a solo ballad for his mother). In the workshop Gordon’s awakening was not staged, and Rhoda sang “It Ends with Life,” a short song in which she narrated the outcomes of the surgery:

RHODA
Here’s what the doc told me
He said Gordo is completely normal
I said, “normal never,” and he said “very funny”
Normal, he said, because he’ll live a normal life span

---

61 In the 2015 Encores! Off-Center production, Finn and Lapine cut “Whenever I Dream” and “Eating Myself Up Alive” in the hallucination sequence, but included all characters in the dance break of “Brain Dead.”
All the legs are dry, no more malformation
The procedure was successful and although quite stressful
To the patient and his friends,
This is how our happy story ends: it ends with life. 

For the production Lapine added Mr. Bungee to Gordon’s hallucination and made him the one responsible for Gordon’s awakening. Finn cut “It Ends with Life” and composed the song “Don’t Give In” to dramatize the awakening. In Gordon’s confused mind, Mr. Bungee sings in a didactic tone, encouraging Gordon to face his hardship and not give in to the coma. He sings, “When you want to quit ’cause nothing works, don’t give in. Quitting is the specialty of jerks.” During the song, “Gordon wakes up and joins Mr. Bungee who no longer seems toxic.” By the end of the song, Roger, Rhoda, and Gordon’s mother echo Mr. Bungee’s words as they stare at Gordon’s hospital bed. Gordon returns to the bed and wakes up singing Mr. Bungee’s song a cappella. As they all embrace, Mr. Bungee sings a new stanza of the song, reinforcing its message. Mr. Bungee is one of the causes of Gordon’s stress and collapse at the beginning of the musical, but this life-threatening experience makes Gordon transform his boss into an incentive not to surrender.

---

62 Finn and Lapine, A New Brain (Workshop), video NCOV 1946, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. Author’s transcription.
63 Finn and Lapine, A New Brain, 64.
64 Ibid., 65.
65 Ibid., 65–66.
66 I have not included a discussion about the homeless lady’s subplot because in both the workshop and the original production of A New Brain, she appears in the same spots and sings the same songs, “Change” and “The Homeless Lady’s Revenge” (titled “On the Street” in the workshop), although some of the lyrics were edited for the production. Unlike Mr. Bungee, the homeless lady was Finn’s idea. (William Finn, interview by author, New York, NY, June 8, 2015).
The conventional book musical that alternates dialogue with songs may also have
different versions depending on the number of songs composed for revivals and their placement
in the plot. Geoffrey Block recounts how several revivals of Show Boat and Anything Goes
compare to their original Broadway productions based on the addition of different songs.\(^{67}\)
However, the conventional book musical must have the spoken dialogue (what Scott McMillin
terms “the order of book time”\(^{68}\)) altered, too, in order to accompany changes made to a song. If
in the traditional book musical, songs expand what the book introduces, as McMillin
convincingly argues, in the sung-through musical, songs alone tell the story, organize the plot,
and form the “order of book time” to introduce, characterize, and develop characters and the
dramatic situation. Alterations in the order of the songs reveal how the creative teams of these
sung-through musicals addressed weaknesses in the plot, fixed problems, and often strengthened
the dramatic action (although such alterations may also impair the development of the dramatic
action, like “Operation Tomorrow” in A New Brain or Mark’s plot hole in Rent).

The three versions of In Trousers and the compositional process of Rent and A New Brain
demonstrate that in the sung-through structure, songs contain everything that the drama must
argues that the Rodgers and Hammerstein revolution “in the form and function of the American
musical” between 1942 and 1960 consisted of turning “the book into the governing principle of a

\(^{67}\) Geoffrey Block, Enchanted Evenings: The Broadway Musical from Show Boat to Sondheim and Lloyd

\(^{68}\) Scott McMillin, The Musical as Drama: A Study of the Principles and Conventions behind Musical
show."\textsuperscript{69} The sung-through musical has challenged this tradition of making the book the governing principle of a musical by blurring the differences between book and songs.

PART III
Children of Postmodernism
Chapter 7

Pastiche Scores: The Sung-Through Musical as Postmodern

The American musical theater went through great amount of change between the late 1960s and mid-1990s. Some musicals started using rock music in their scores. This time period also saw the emergence of the concept musical, the adult musical, director’s theater, choreography-based musicals, the jukebox musical, revivals set in smaller and more intimate theaters than those on Broadway, the development of Off- and Off-Off-Broadway circuits, and, finally, a large-scale emergence of sung-through scores. These new facets of the American musical theater made it enter a new phase of its development as a new generation of composers, lyricists, and book writers both continued and challenged the tradition.

The same time period was transformative in other artistic developments, economies, and politics worldwide that it is also considered to mark the birth and solidification of postmodernism. Literary critic Frederic Jameson credits the shift from modernism to postmodernism between 1963 and 1975. In the performing arts, this shift occurred with the advancement of new performers, such as the Beatles, and staging of canonic plays and books, such Peter Brook’s stagings of operas and Shakespeare, Jerzy Grotowsky’s approaches to acting

---


and theatrical productions, Beckett’s theater, and the development of Off-Broadway theaters in New York. In the 1980s scholars looking back and theorizing the recent past complicated the fine line that existed between postmodernism as a style or undertaking that questioned and challenged modernism, and postmodernism as a condition, whose ideology permeated the globe and was put to practice even if subconsciously. As Hans Bertens explains, in this decade “Jürgen Habermas, Jean-François Lyotard, Fredric Jameson, Jean Baudrillard, and Richard Rorty definitely put postmodernism and postmodernity on the theoretical map.” Their arguments and ideas responded to important changes that had taken place in politics, economic order, social life, and culture and defined what constituted the postmodern era.

Jameson’s theories of postmodernism established that art and culture could be analyzed and contextualized in postmodernity just like contemporary developments in economics and politics. Steven Connor, also a literary critic, has confirmed Jameson’s contribution to theories of the postmodern writing:

The work of Frederic Jameson may be seen as maintaining the fragile equilibrium between description and recommendation, which is why that work has been read in so many different ways: as a stern critique of postmodernism; as a subtle preservation of the project of the modern through strategic accommodation to the postmodern; and as a full-scale capitulation to postmodernism.5

---


4 Bertens, The Idea of Postmodern, 111.

Jameson himself has acknowledged that after 1985 with changes in geopolitics and the ultimate victory of capitalism with the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, postmodernism solidified as a historical period. He concludes, “Modernity, in the sense of modernization and progress . . . was now definitely over; and what I tried to do, along with many others, working with different terminologies no doubt, was to explore the shape of the new historical period we had begun to enter around 1980.”

If the American musical theater went through transformations at the same time that the tenets of postmodernism were being formed and eventually solidified, what were the changes in musical theater that helped it enter and prosper in the postmodern era? In this chapter I explore how the use of pastiche in a sung-through structure adheres to one of postmodernism’s tenets and reflects how the American musical theater has entered and thrived in this “new historical period.” Pastiche in music consists of employing and combining different musical styles in one single work, and The Human Comedy, Hello Again, Rent, The Wild Party, and Caroline, or Change all feature pastiche of popular music in their scores.

The theoretical frame for my argument derives from Jameson’s concept of pastiche in postmodern art. He has argued that in reacting to former artistic movements, postmodernism claims that all art forms are saturated and cannot move forward to new ideals, so the only aesthetic solution is to recollect existing art forms and give them new identities and functions. I

---


7 Musical pastiche occurred in musicals from before the time period that I cover in this dissertation. For example, Kurt Weill’s Street Scene (1947) and Love Life (1948), and in several musicals of the 1970s, such as Jesus Christ Superstar (1971) and Godspell (1971). I follow Jameson’s steps by suggesting that pastiche had existed before 1980, but as minor feature in a given art form or genre; after the solidification of postmodernism, pastiche was no longer peripheral, but central to art making and cultural production (see Frederic Jameson, “Postmodernism and Consumer Society,” in The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983–1998 [New York: Verso, 1998], 18).
investigate the multivalent reasons why composers of sung-through musicals employed various musical styles in their scores and the impact that pastiche had in the reception of their works. Ultimately, this chapter considers these sung-through musicals as case studies of how pastiche as a means of expression marks a key resource for the American musical to remain relevant during the postmodern period.⁸

**Defining Pastiche in Postmodernism**

Jameson cites pastiche as a fundamental resource for artistic creation in postmodernity. He argues that modernism allowed artists to invent personal, private, and unmistakable styles. The post-World War II years accelerated the development of capitalism and initiated postmodern culture. New types of consumption, rapid changes in fashion, introduction of broadcast television, the media, and tensions between urban and rural communities led to the emergence of new societies, in which individuality lost its aesthetic place. After the 1960s, artists no longer had a “unique private world and style to express,” and after modernism reinvented and exhausted all possible styles, postmodern artists found themselves facing the impossibility of creating new styles.⁹ Jameson concludes, “In a world in which stylistic innovation is no longer possible, all that is left is to imitate dead styles, to speak through the masks and with the voices of the styles in the imaginary museum.”¹⁰

---

⁸ Pastiche in musical theater is not an isolated phenomenon but an integral part of musical postmodernism. Luciano Berio’s *Sinfonia* (1969) is an example of a musical work that represents postmodern pastiche. The main source for musical quotations in the third movement is the scherzo from Mahler’s Symphony no. 2, while the main source for the textual quotations is Samuel Beckett’s *The Unnamable* (1953).


¹⁰ Ibid., 7.
This assessment and evaluation of the authorial voice appears in other theories of postmodernism. Attacking conventional understandings of language and representation, Roland Barthes laid some of the foundation for theories of postmodernism claiming that a text is “a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash” as “a tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centers of culture. . . . The writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior . . . [and] mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any of them.”11 He expanded this idea by differentiating work from Text.12 The former has its meanings limited by genre, and the reader cannot engage in the production of the text because reading is an act of consumption, and the work is a commodity. In a Text, the reader is not restricted by genre or linearity and can actively and intellectually produce the meaning of the writing beyond the author.13 Barthes’s postulations influenced the advancement of post-structuralism and semiotics in the 1970s, creating an early postmodern awareness of the inherent aspect of a “tissue of quotations” against the modernists’ esteem for originality. Barthes’s concept of Text is a postmodern (and post-structuralistic) way of approaching and reading any works from any period.

Umberto Eco concurred, discussing whether a plot “can be found also in the form of quotation of other plots” and indicating that this issue “was to be realized by the American theorists of postmodernism.”14 Indeed, his explanation of one of the tenets of postmodernism


12 The noun “Text,” in Barthes’s argument, must have a capital T to differentiate it from the conventional meaning of the work text.


follows Jameson’s theory: “the moment comes when the avant-garde (the modern) can go no further, because it has produced a metalanguage that speaks of its impossible texts (conceptual art). The postmodern reply to the modern consists of recognizing that the past, since it cannot really be destroyed, because its destruction leads to silence, must be revisited: but with irony, not innocently.”15 In his own novel The Name of the Rose, Eco created a character who embodies no particular voice through pastiche. Salvatore, the narrator Adso describes, “spoke all languages, and no language. . . . none correct, taking words sometimes from one and sometimes from another . . . inventing his own sentences . . . heard some time in the past.”16

For Jameson, parody and pastiche mark different ways of executing mimicry of the past. Parody imitates styles of the past “and seizes on their idiosyncrasies and eccentricities to produce an imitation which mocks the original.”17 Pastiche, on the other hand, is the “imitation of a peculiar or unique style . . . but it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without parody’s ulterior motive, without the satirical impulse, without laughter.”18 While parody is imitation with a point and agenda, pastiche is imitation for imitation’s sake, “the cannibalization of all the styles of the past, the play of random stylistic allusion.”19 The past becomes a repository of genres and styles, and the resulting work of art is a simulacrum, that is, “an identical copy for which no original has ever existed.”20 Thus, pastiche results from art’s failure to innovate stylistically. Postmodern art

15 Ibid., 67.
18 Ibid., 5.
20 Ibid.
resorts to imitation, combining different styles of the past and re-contextualizing what has already been established and expressed culturally.

While Jameson considers pastiche in postmodernism a crisis in representation, Linda Hutcheon argues that as it looks to the past, postmodernism relies on what is “historically grounded” and, therefore, politicizes representation. She claims parody as central to her point and equates it to “‘ironic quotation, pastiche, appropriation, [and] intertextuality.’”

Unlike Jameson’s neutral imitation of the past, Hutcheon argues, “Through a double process of installing and ironizing [historical context], parody signals how present representations come from past ones and what ideological consequences derive from both continuity and difference.”

Resorting to the past, even within Jameson’s theorization of pastiche, always retains some political dimension through ideology that is ironically revived in the representation of the past, which explains her equaling parody to pastiche. For Hutcheon, parody re-presents and represents the past.

**Pastiche and Musical Theater**

From the late nineteenth until the second half of the twentieth century, musical theater songs comprised a significant portion of America’s popular music. These songs had a symbiotic relationship with the music publishing industry of that era, Tin Pan Alley: theater songs were


22 Ibid.

23 For additional writings on parody, see Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 22–27. For further comparisons between Jameson’s pastiche and Hutcheon’s parody, see Bertens, *The Idea of the Postmodern*, 78–79 and 160–64. I consider Jameson’s and Hutcheon’s theories as they both examine postmodernism’s reliance on styles of the past. It is not my goal to consider Jameson’s neutral views of pastiche in contrast to Hutcheon’s politicized view of parody in this discussion of pastiche in musical theater. I employ parody here as Jameson defines it.
published in Tin Pan Alley (such as George M. Cohan’s “Give My Regards to Broadway”), and Tin Pan Alley songs were often interpolated into musicals, such as Irvin Berlin’s “Blue Skies,” which was interpolated into Rodgers and Hart’s musical *Betsy* (1926). This relationship started breaking down in the 1950s. In that decade, some relatively successful songs at the top charts of popular music did come from Broadway musicals, such as “I’ve Never Been in Love Before” from *Guys and Dolls* (1950), “They Call the Wind Maria” from *Paint Your Wagon* (1951), “The Street Where You Live” from *My Fair Lady* (1956), and “Till There Was You” from *The Music Man* (1957). Simultaneously, genres of popular music, such as rock and roll, country, blues, R&B, and gospel were gaining more strength in a decade when the United States was flourishing economically and exporting its culture to the rest of the world in an unprecedented way.  

The gap between the musical stage and popular music widened in the 1960s, when the music business strengthened and recording companies proliferated and controlled the industry. That decade widened the gap with Beatlemania (1964), Motown music, the consolidation of folk music as a genre with the so-called folk-revival (especially in the music of Simon & Garfunkel and Bob Dylan), and developments in rock music (such as the Grateful Dead, Janis Joplin, and Jimi Hendrix). Added to developments of psychedelic rock and the ideology of a counterculture that denied music of the immediate preceding generation, including musical theater songs, popular music prospered independently from the theater.

Songs from successful musicals of the time, such as *Gypsy* (1959), *Fiddler on the Roof* (1964), and *Cabaret* (1966), did not become hits or achieve the popularity and financial success

---

that rock songs did or that musical theater songs had achieved prior to the mid-1950s. Theater songs formed a separate category or genre of popular music, generally designated as “show tunes.” This gap extended into the 1970s, as Charles Hamm wrote about it in 1979: “Musical comedy—once a chief arena for the launching and popularization of hit tunes—has been mostly out of step with recent popular song styles of America. Its audience today is predominantly urban, sophisticated, and upper class; its songs seem to have little to say to teenage and college audiences who comprise the bulk of the market for popular song.”

The gap between musical theater and popular music evinces a shift in the arts and culture in the third quarter of the twentieth century, which led into the postmodern period.

Theater composers began to bridge the gap as early as the late 1960s, when they started adapting forms of popular music from outside the theater and mixing them with their own compositional styles. Examples include *Hair* (1967), *Promises, Promises* (1968), *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1971), and *Grease* (1972). Songs from these musicals became hits and peaked in charts of pop singles, such as “Aquarius/Let the Sunshine In,” “I’ll Never Fall in Love Again,” “I Don’t Know How to Love Him,” and “Summer Nights,” although this last one was not successful in the charts until the movie version of *Grease* in 1978. Subsequent decades continued to see music from outside the theater entering the scores of new musicals, and employing

25 I do not imply that the term “show tune” was coined then, just that the word started designating a category of popular music that came from the theater and was no longer at the top of the charts. See also David W. Galenson, “From *White Christmas* to *Sgt. Pepper*: The Conceptual Revolution in Popular Music,” *Historical Methods* 42, no. 1 (2009): 17–32.


27 *Bye Bye Birdie* (1960) marks an example of a musical from the first half of the 1960s that used contemporary popular music in its score. However, the musical poked fun on the impact that rock and roll had in the young generation of the late 1950s and satirized the genre. Although songs sung by the youths feature rock and roll harmonic progressions and rhythm (such as “The Telephone Hour” and “One Boy”), only two songs employed rock and roll (“Honestly Sincere” and “One More Kiss”), both sung by Conrad Birdie, a parody of Elvis Presley.
different styles of popular music in musical theater resulted in scores that critics, historians, and even musical theater songwriters have characterized as pastiche.

Musical theater does not employ pastiche to imitate what Jameson terms “dead styles,” but musical styles that antedate the score of a musical. Some scores imitate just one style or genre of the past and employ it for dramatic purposes. Examples include Sondheim’s *Follies*, a pastiche of 1920s and 1930s musical theater idioms, and *Grease*, a pastiche of rock and roll of the late 1950s. Another way that pastiche occurs in the American musical theater is when a composer combines various musical styles and genres of popular music that antedate the score, creating eclectic soundscapes. This occurs in *The Human Comedy*, *Hello Again*, *Rent*, *The Wild Party*, and *Caroline, or Change*.

Michael John LaChiusa and Jeanine Tesori employed pastiche in their respective works to recreate musically the time period and place of the plot. This comports with Jameson’s concept of “nostalgia for the present.” He argues that associated with the notion of returning to the past to create something new in the present, postmodern artists and audiences also display a desire for the present (the here and now) of the past. Focusing on films of the 1980s, Jameson writes that plots that take place in the past are “not a representation of historical content,” but an approach of “the past through stylistic connotation [to] convey ‘pastness.’”28 The final creation is a simulacrum of the past in the present, and the process of assimilating the past in the present unfolds “by way of the pastiche of the stereotypical past.”29


29 Ibid., 21. Jameson contrasts the term pastiche with schizophrenia in his writings. The former refers to spatial aspects of postmodern art, while the latter characterizes postmodern temporality (see ibid, 25–27). He also explains this concept in “Postmodernism and Consumer Society,” 7–10.
*Change*, pastiche of popular music exemplifies Jameson’s concept, bringing the past to the audience’s present.

*Hello Again* features ten couples in ten different scenes, and each scene takes place in a different decade of the twentieth century (see Appendix A). Since the decades are not presented chronologically, musical pastiche becomes the means to set the time period in which a new scene happens.\(^{30}\) Indeed, LaChiusa explained: “Pastiche plays a very important role in the show . . . , and I feel pastiche gives color, place, and time.”\(^{31}\) The ten couples display anxiety over the confusion between love and sex, and LaChiusa’s use of pastiche also reflects this confusion. As he never settles in one single musical style, but mixes different ones to his own compositional style, the piece leaves a musical question mark analogous to the question that the plot leaves concerning love and sex\(^ {32}\) (see Table 7.1).

**Table 7.1. Musical style for each scene in *Hello Again.***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene</th>
<th>Decade</th>
<th>Musical style</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scene 1</td>
<td>ca. 1900</td>
<td>Slow waltz*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 2</td>
<td>1940s</td>
<td>Swing*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 3</td>
<td>1960s</td>
<td>Moderate blues*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 4</td>
<td>1930s</td>
<td>Slow rhumba, beguine*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 5</td>
<td>1950s</td>
<td>Rock and roll, opera</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 6</td>
<td>1910s</td>
<td>Tango, barcarole*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 7</td>
<td>1970s</td>
<td>Disco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 8</td>
<td>1920s</td>
<td>Silent film music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 9</td>
<td>1980s</td>
<td>Industrial funk,* pop-rock*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{30}\) The playbill of the original production provided the decade in which each of the ten scenes took place.


\(^{32}\) Ibid.
Individual songs help create a musical mood that evokes the decade in question. The Soldier’s “I Got a Little Time” in scene 2 features an easy flowing rhythm and the beat marked on the high hat, as it would have been heard in big bands of the 1940s. The quintet singing “and the angels sigh” during the Soldier and the Nurse’s sex invokes Benny Goodman and Ziggy Elman’s “And the Angels Sing” (1939). The Young Thing’s “Safe” in scene 7 has an ostinato in the bass that recalls electric bass lines of disco, such as the Bee Gees’s “Stayin’ Alive” and Gloria Gaynor’s “I Will Survive.” “Silent Movie” in scene 8 underscores pantomimed dialogue between the Writer and the Actress with a fast, syncopated piano solo that musically depicts humor, tension, and love. “Mistress of the Senator” in scene 9 has its main melody and fast-paced repetitive chromatic bass reminiscent of Cindi Lauper. The tenth scene opens with a reiteration of the waltz from scene 1 and ends with a reprise of “Hello Again,” also from the first scene. In between, the senator’s song “The Bed Was Not My Own” does not sound like pastiche from any specific musical genre or style. LaChiusa does not make the song sound necessarily typical of the 1990s, but by composing it with material from all other songs of the musical,\(^{33}\) he conceptualizes the idea of pastiche itself. The scene that happens in the “present” looks back to the past and reuses material from it. As discussed in chapter 3, the songs “Tom” (from scene 5) and “The Bed Was Not My Own” mark the two pivotal moments in the coordination of the plot, which correspond to the fact that these are the only songs in Hello Again that do not reference a specific musical style or genre.

\(^{33}\) Ibid.
LaChiusa’s use of pastiche to create a sung-through score caught the attention of critics. John Simon from the *New York Magazine* did not realize LaChiusa’s conscious agenda in employing pastiche and dismissed the technique writing that *Hello Again* “leaps back and forth across the decades of our century for no better reason than to accommodate pastiches of different types of music from operatic to operettic, from torchy to twitchy, from swing to rock.”

Greg Evans from *Variety* gave a positive review, but downplayed the pastiche. He wrote: “LaChiusa resists locking himself into the musical forms of the various decades, [but] he does adopt and adapt where he sees fit. . . . Despite the pastiche, though, the mostly sung-through musical has a seamlessness that owes more than a little to the operetta stylings of Lapine/Sondheim.” For LaChiusa himself, the musical concerns “the search for one’s ideal lover—and that time and place don’t really matter in the long or short run, though time and place may dictate the manner in which we express ourselves.”

Recreating musical styles in vogue during the decade that each scene takes place provides the characters with a powerful means for expressing a conflict that unifies them all.

Jeanine Tesori and Tony Kushner’s *Caroline, or Change* tells the story of an African American maid working for a Jewish white family in Louisiana of the early 1960s (see Appendix A). The soundscape of the musical derived from this diversity within one house. Tesori observed that just as Kushner created a house with different floors (the basement, where Caroline works, the living room and kitchen on the ground floor, and the bedrooms on the second floor), she

---


created a score with different musical layers. Caroline’s music is based on field hollers mixed with Etta James’s vocal style, as heard in songs like “16 Feet Beneath the Sea,” “I Got Four Kids,” “1943,” and “Lot’s Wife.” Caroline’s radio is represented by a girl group that sings in doo-wop with nods to the Supremes and Martha and the Vandellas (“The Radio” and “Salty Teardrops”), the washing machine sings in the style of Motown R&B (“Ooh Child”), and the dryer sings in a style between Nat King Cole and James Brown (“The Drier” and “Rose Recovers”).

In the ground floor, we hear Sondheim-influenced sung dialogues mixed with Jewish tunes (“Long Distance,” “Rose Stopnick Can Cook,” and “The Chanukah Party”). This is also the street level where Caroline takes the bus, meets with Dotty, and interacts with her children. For these scenes, Tesori employed Motown R&B and soul music (“Dotty and Caroline,” “The Bus,” “Roosevelt Petrucius Coleslaw,” and “I Hate the Bus”). On the second floor, we hear Stuart playing his clarinet, and his music sometimes sounds like he is practicing the instrument (“There Is No God, Noah” and “Stuart and Noah”), other like he is playing it and quoting Mozart’s Clarinet Concerto in A Major (“Quarter in the Bleach Cup”). Above the house and the street, the moon sings mellifluous soprano solos (“Moon Change”). Some numbers present the action occurring in two levels simultaneously, and the music from these levels combines, as happens during “Noah Has a Problem” and “Caroline Takes My Money Home.” Tesori’s use of pastiche distinguishes the many characters—human or inanimate—and the places that they inhabit.

---


38 When Caroline, or Change moved to Broadway, two other musicals used a doo-wop girl group as Greek chorus: Hairspray, which had opened in 2002, and the 2003 Broadway production of Little Shop of Horrors.
It is not just the parallel with the house that informs Tesori’s musical choices. She has also used musical genres as signifiers of race. Only African American characters (including the washing machine, the dryer, the radio, and the bus) sing in genres associated with music from that community, such as the blues, R&B, Motown, and soul music. The Stopnicks and Gellmans sing in style typical of musical theater combined with klezmer and classical music; the moon sings in operatic style. Tesori’s interweaving of styles and genres musically depicts racial and class conflicts among the characters. Alex Abramovich wrote for the *New York Times* that *Caroline* “is a deeply progressive play, in that its characters are bound to one another by the wages they pay and receive, and those characters’ efforts to recognize the nature of that relationship account for a good part of its dramatic action.”

Continuous music in the sung-through format helps the plot navigate through these characters’ race, class, and religion. Musical pastiche aurally represents this variety and enhances the means through which characters express what they experience both individually and collectively.

*Caroline, or Change* distinguishes pastiche of styles and genres from that of individual voices. In my interview Tesori mentioned particular voices that she had in mind to create the soundscape of *Caroline*. The music that she wrote for Caroline sounds like songs by Etta James because Tesori believed that this singer embodied the notion of a struggling African American woman during the 1960s. The music for the girl group that represents the radio derived from the input from one of the actresses in the group, Ramona Keller, whose mother was part of one of the first girl groups when she was twelve years old. The choice for Mozart came from the fact that William Kushner, Tony Kushner’s father, was a clarinetist and conductor and the inspiration for the character of Stuart. Tesori asked him what his favorite piece was so that she could make it

---

part of Stuart’s characterization, and he replied Mozart’s Clarinet Concerto in A Major. 40

Finally, Tesori considered the musical The Gospel at Colonus an influential piece in the compositional process of Caroline. 41 With music by Bob Telson, the musical employs R&B and gospel to turn Sophocles’ play Oedipus at Colonus into a church service in which the Greek tragedy functions like an Old Testament parable and Oedipus is transformed from cursed to revered. The songs feature Motown influence, soloists are harmonized by backing vocals with room for improvisation of high notes and belting technique. 42 Thus, Caroline, or Change is postmodern for borrowing individual voices of the past, those residing in what Jameson calls the “imaginary museum.” 43 Tesori’s score relies on these voices’ authenticity to create the musical’s identity.

The reception of the work considered the use of pastiche an effective way to depict musically American society of the early 1960s. Jessica Branch from Time Out New York magazine wrote, “Using a wide range of musical idioms, Tesori has turned Kushner’s libretto . . . into a sung-through work whose complexities echo the strains and harmonies of a society in upheaval.” She adds, “Most impressive is how the composer controls this potentially riotous soundscape, something she sees as her major contribution to the piece.” 44 Ben Brantley admired the score writing, “Ms. Tesori’s postmodern collage of a score, which quotes everything from

41 Ibid. The original idea and development of The Gospel at Colonus was by experimental-theater director Lee Breuer. The musical was conceived in 1983 and played on Broadway in 1988.
42 In the original production, several cast members played the role of Oedipus collectively, including the members of the gospel group The Blind Boys of Alabama.
Motown to Mozart, is excellent in capturing the swirl and disjunction of patterns of thought.”

Other critics dismissed the composer’s choice of a pastiche score and used the term pejoratively to describe her music. Clive Barnes wrote, Tesori “devised a drearily pastiche score situated in that tempting gray area between opera and Broadway and running some kind of eclectic gamut from there and back.”

Perhaps because of this criticism, Tesori believes that the term pastiche carries a negative connotation. “When you’re working with found objects or found styles and you’re trying to do something with it, the more interesting question is why you’re doing it. What is she [the composer] after? As opposed to ‘she’s just a woman working in pastiche.’” She prefers the modernist term “collage” and explains: “Collage is made of found materials, and I don’t think people do it negatively.”

By employing pastiche to set time and place, LaChiusa and Tesori have brought the musical into the postmodern era, and their scores comports with Jameson’s theory of postmodern art: these scores represent each composer’s notions and ideas about the past, and audiences assimilate the past through connotations derived from differing musical genres and styles.

Other theater composers may use pastiche to fulfill a personal aesthetic framework. Galt MacDermot explained how jazz (especially Duke Ellington) fascinated him as a teenager and made him follow a career in music. He studied composition in Cape Town, South Africa, where he was exposed to many other musical genres and worked as a church organist in Montréal.

---


the time he arrived in New York in 1964, he was a fan of rock music and wanted to use all these musical styles in his compositions. In his opinion: “Music is a very tricky thing. It can get boring. So you got to change it. And that means changing the style, changing all the ingredients . . . and that’s really the basis of working in the theater: it’s variety.” When he learned about the content of *Hair*, MacDermot realized that mixing all musical styles he was familiar with was going to enhance the musical’s agenda, and as he explained: “[Rado and Ragni, the creators of *Hair*] did not want the show to throw back to the old idiom of Broadway musicals. I didn’t really like that style of music, so I was fine with getting rid of that sound altogether.” Variety in the score of *Hair* comes from ballad to psychedelic rock, funk, country, and soul music. MacDermot’s use of pastiche in *Hair* confronted musical theater songwriting in 1967 in the same way that the show’s sardonic attitudes criticized American values and the Vietnam War.

When he composed the music for *The Human Comedy* in the early 1980s, MacDermot exercised the same method of employing musical variety, except now for a sung-through score. He thus created a score that blended many different musical styles and genres, and attributed them to specific characters and situations. The curious Ulysses asks his mother about the world around him using country music (“Mama”); the Macaulay family sings about their situation in slow ballads whose accompaniments and countermelodies, played by guitar and violins provide a folk flavor to the score (“We’re a Little Family,” “The Birds in the Sky,” Remember Always to Give,” “The World Is Full of Loneliness,” and “Dear Brother Homer”); the chorus intervenes and comments on the action in gospel songs (“Beautiful Music,” “Long Past Sunset,” “As the

---


Poet Said,” and “Fathers and Mothers”). Many of the characters use jitterbug to express cheerfulness, such as Homer in “Noses,” Bess and Mary in “I Let Him Kiss Me Once,” Marcus in “My Sister Bess,” Diana in “I’ve Known a Lot of Guys,” and Spangler in “Diana.” The boys on the war front sing barbershop ballads, such as “How I Love” and “Everlasting.” The interludes, “Bicycle Ride,” “Train,” and “Nightmare,” reveal MacDermot’s jazz influences with room for improvisation for the piano and saxophone. MacDermot also composed songs that feature elements of pop music (steady drums, strumming guitar providing harmonic rhythm, and a bass all accompanying diatonic melodies). In addition to wide range and use of parlando, these songs express the lyrics theatrically, becoming powerful monologues for the main characters (“Everything Is Changed,” “I Don’t Know Who to Hate,” and “I’ll Always Love You”). Clive Barnes’s description of MacDermot’s score for Hair seems apropos for The Human Comedy: it “appeals to people who like The Sound of Music, as well as the sound of music.”

MacDermot’s musical variety in The Human Comedy mirrors the variety that occurs in Dumaresq’s script, which in turn originated in Saroyan’s original film plot and subsequent novel. The musical presents various contrasting topics ranging from celebrating life to coping with death. A couple that has recently fallen in love (Spangler and Diana) contrasts with a widow bearing the loss of her husband and son (Homer’s mother, Kate). A variety of ages faces the same situation, from young Ulysses and his curiosity to understand the world around him, Homer understanding that war in Europe has ramifications for his hometown in California, to Mr. Grogan, the oldest of all characters, whose heart cannot resist when he has to tell his young co-

---

50 Clive Barnes, review of Hair, by John Rado, Gerome Ragni, Galt MacDermot, Biltmore Theater, New York, Saturday Evening Post, August 10, 1968.
worker that his brother died in action. Musical variety in The Human Comedy aurally depicts the
totality of perspectives featured in the plot.

Critics realized how crucial pastiche was to the story and adaptation of Saroyan’s original
novel. Clive Barnes wrote that MacDermot’s music “runs the narrow line between creativity and
pastiche, and it not only evokes its own period, but also contrives to maintain its own
contemporary validity.” Michael Feingold argued that the “music has the power to transcend
the dubious parts of [Saroyan’s novel] and intensify the good ones,” and MacDermot
accomplished this by using “a rhythm, usually in some familiar dance form, to define each short
scene; dances that reflect the period of the work [1940s], like the rhumba and the jitterbug, are
jostled by gavotte and tarantella on one side, waltz clog and the strict 4/4 of English folk ballads
on the other.” Frank Rich wrote that the musical complements Saroyan’s novel, pointing out
that “as befits Saroyan’s pantheistic sense of community, the music is also highly eclectic: it
encompasses gospel, jazz, swing, hymns, barbershop harmonies, blues, and plaintive lullabies
that almost might have been written by Woody Guthrie.” Rich also argued that The Human
Comedy was “a lovely show that is far closer to Hair than one might expect,” claiming that both
musicals “subscribe to the same fairy-tale dream of democracy: wars come and go, but justice is
their only ideological creed.” Indeed, both Hair and The Human Comedy make strong social
commentaries, and MacDermot’s pastiche articulates and expresses them.

---

51 Clive Barnes, review of The Human Comedy, by Galt MacDermot and William Dumaresq, The Public

52 Michael Feingold, review of The Human Comedy, by Galt MacDermot and William Dumaresq, The

53 Frank Rich, review of The Human Comedy, by Galt MacDermot and William Dumaresq, The Public
For Andrew Lippa, musical variety conceptualizes a musical and makes it transcend the time period in which it was conceived. The score of his musical *The Wild Party* employs different musical styles to depict the events that occur throughout the party. The original production opened with a trumpet solo in “Queenie Was a Blonde” growling Queenie’s main theme, which was soon followed by a bass line marked in the score to be swung. These musical traits instantly set the musical in the 1920s. “The Juggernaut” later in Act I started with a “wah-wah” trumpet solo and a walking bass that also characterize the time period. In contrast, the electric guitar in both songs added a rock flavor to the soundscape, especially the climax of “The Juggernaut,” in which the electric guitar plays in octaves with high-pitched trumpets at the repetition of the song’s main theme.

Other songs in the score provide variety in the same way that the party attendees provide color to Queenie’s party. Queenie herself enters the party singing Latin music. “Raise the Roof” features rhythmic accompaniment typical of a salsa, and Lippa marked the measure in which Queenies begins to sing with the word “Guaracha,” a genre of Cuban music in a fast tempo. Eddie and Mae sing their duet “Two of a Kind” in a type of swung jazz with hammer-struck chords accompanied by the pattern of an eighth note on the offbeat leading to a quarter note on the downbeat of a new measure, encompassing a perfect fourth, reminiscent of John Kander’s “jazz” for the musical *Chicago*. Madelaine True sings “An Old-Fashioned Love Story” while she searches for a lover among the women of the party. As she idealizes “a well-rendered, one gendered lesbian love story,”54 the music imitates the sounds and form of an early Tin Pan Alley song. The verse in 4/4 contains step-wise melodies, syllabic text setting, and is performed in *parlando*, while the 32-measure refrain in 2/4 is in ABAC form with a catchy tune, wide leaps,

---

and a bass pattern alternates between scale degree 1 at the downbeat and scale degree 5 at the upbeat. The tempo marking for the chorus is “Broadway.” The only aspect that is not typical of early Tin Pan Alley songs is that the repetitions of both verse and chorus contain different lyrics.

Two moments in the musical reveal the characters to be worked up by all the games and seduction happening during the party, and the characters release themselves through gospel songs. “A Wild, Wild Party” occurs in the middle of Act I as the guests attempt to calm things down after a fight breaks between Burrs and Queenie towards the end of “The Juggernaut.” All characters participate in a reverie of biblical passages, concluding, “If in Heaven you don’t excel, you can always party down in hell.” Lippa marked the score for this song with the indication “gospel jump” to be played in “tempo di Sunday morning,” which is emphasized by sections in three- and four-part harmony and hand clapping. In Act II, when Burrs realizes that Queenie is attracted to Black, he sings “Let Me Drown” to express his desperation in losing control over Queenie. Lippa marked the score for this song as “Charleston Gospel Swing,” and indeed the fast tempo and syncopated chords in the bass and the short lines in the vocal part echoed by the guests in four- and five-part harmony ensure a gospel feel.

A final aspect of Lippa’s pastiche is his treatment of the music for the main four characters, Queenie, Burrs, Black, and Kate. He reserved a combination of pop music with touches of jazz (especially walking bass and hi-hat accompaniment) with room for belting for the four main characters in their respective solos. Queenie’s solos that bookend the musical, “Out of the Blues” and “How Did We Come to This?,” Kate’s solos “Look at Me Now” and “Life of the Party,” Burrs’s “What Is It About Her?,” and Black’s “I’ll Be Here” all receive indications of *colla voce* by the composer, granting the protagonists’ voices a free tempo that the instruments

---

55 Ibid., 59.
are forced to follow. As one critic noted, “The ballads with which these four sybarites express their feelings for one another are of the high-decibel, swooping pop variety made popular by Frank Wildhorn.”\textsuperscript{56} “Poor Child” is the only song in which they express their feeling simultaneously. After all of the four has joined in the singing, the song acquires an isorhythmic quality as each character repeats a rhythmic pattern or a segment of a melody, which approximates the structure of Verdi’s famous quartet for \textit{Rigoletto}.

For Lippa, who wrote music, lyrics, and book for this musical, \textit{The Wild Party} “is a piece set in a period, it is not a period piece.”\textsuperscript{57} His score brings the musical to the postmodern era through pastiche. Lippa’s soundscape enables different musical styles to coexist, dramatize the past, and make points about the present. While composing the music, he believed that the musical was as much about

1999 as it was 1929. The notion of these little-level celebrities, this little show folk trying to be bigger than they are, their behaviors and addictions to drug and alcohol and sex that permeated their little world was one that permeates our little world. And so musically, it opened for me the door to lots of styles, you could be pan-stylistic, if there is such a term, and still feel like the same show. And I think musically I accomplished that.\textsuperscript{58}

This connection between past and present and the erasure of differences, revealing essential traits of human behavior and emotion that cross different time periods conforms to postmodernism’s notion of “present-ness,” that is, artistic creations of postmodernity exist timelessly. Steven Connor’s explanation of the concept befits Lippa’s agenda: “one definition of postmodernism might be: that condition in which for the first time, and as a result from technologies that allow large-scale storage, access, and reproduction of records of the past, the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[57] Andrew Lippa, interview by author, New York, NY, June 20, 2015.
\item[58] Ibid.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
past appears to be included in the present, or at the present’s disposal, and in which the ratio between present and past has therefore changed.”

Connor expands Jameson’s views that modernists created art with their backs to the past and faces to the future, while postmodernists “live in a perpetual present and in a perpetual change that obliterates traditions of the kind which all earlier social information have had, in one way or another, to preserve.”

The reception of *The Wild Party* after its Off-Broadway opening highlighted its pastiche in a sung-through structure. Brendan Lemon wrote in *The New York Times*, “Mr. Lippa’s dense and sprawling score is made up of everything from classical vaudeville to Henry Mancini-like riffs to ‘ohh-baby-baby’ rhythm and blues, as well as fusion jazz.” Charles Isherwood described the musical as “virtually sung-through, with minimal dialogue bridging musical numbers, and a nary reprise in sight . . . Musical styles range from introspective piano ballads to gospel-inflected roof-raisers, torch songs to pop-rock anthems to classic Broadway showstoppers.” Isherwood did not consider pastiche a strong feature of the musical, claiming that Lippa is “a skilled student of musical theater history, but where is his voice? And the wide variety of musical idioms employed doesn’t help to set a consistent tone or convincingly establish the show’s milieu. At one point in the final moments we seem to go from Frank Wildhorn to Kurt Weill in a few disconcerting bars of music.” Linda Winer concurred, but gave a slightly more positive spin than Isherwood. She wrote that Lippa “turns out nonstop high-

---

59 Connor, 10.


profile pop, jazz, and show-biz pastiche with less than groundbreaking originality, but much like
the late Jonathan Larson, [Lippa] has a much-needed and entirely honorable gift for synthesizing
younger sensibilities with Broadway tradition.” She added that “Raise the Roof” and “Life of the
Party” could position on pop charts, some ballads towards the end of the show are “Andrew
Lloyd Webberesque,” and the variety of styles suggests that “Lippa may have feared he would
never again get a chance to show every single style he knows how to write.”63 While critics may
have concluded that such variety masked Lippa’s own compositional voice, the composer sought
to depict the complex and varied characters at that wild party and draw a comparison between
the past and present.

Pastiche in musical theater has the potential to bridge the gap between popular music and
musical theater. Jonathan Larson evidently had such a goal for Rent. Larson composed songs that
draw on rock, Latin music, pop ballads, gospel, and even tango for this musical. In one of
Larson’s lyrics sketches, he wrote the words “pastiche” and “parody” at the center of the page,
and “possibilitys?” [sic] below.64 These words appear in the middle of a page that contains
Larson’s ideas for the end of the musical. Right above them he wrote “End – Roger writes the
song + Mark burns the film.” Below the words, he entered Roger’s lines “tonight I’m gonna
write this song.” The presence of the words pastiche and parody on this sheet suggests that
Larson was aware that their definitions relate to each other. But more than this, they may indicate
that Larson saw Roger’s diegetic song “Your Eyes” at the end of the musical as a moment of
either pastiche or parody of Puccini’s music, since Roger’s song conspicuously quotes the main

63 Linda Winer, review of The Wild Party, by Andrew Lippa, Manhattan Theater Club, New York,

64 Jonathan Larson, Rent Show Materials, “Miscellaneous,” Box 14, Folder 7, Jonathan Larson Papers,
Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.
theme from Musetta’s aria “Quando me’n vo’.” Because the sheet is undated, it is impossible to know if it precedes or succeeds the composition of “Your Eyes,” but the preceding page in the sketchbook suggests that the Puccini reference was already in the composer’s mind. Larson wrote, “Puccini’s theme—whenever Roger attempts to work on his ‘piece’ it winds up sounding like Puccini.”

Additional evidence that Larson consciously sought to employ pastiche can be found in the same sketchbook. He listed the songs that he had composed for Rent and notated information about instrumentation and style for each (see Table 7.2).

Table 7.2. Songs from Rent and their instrumentation and style as indicated by Jonathan Larson.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Song</th>
<th>Style</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Message</td>
<td>Quiet comedy acapella</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Puccini</td>
<td>Loud guitar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Rent</td>
<td>Loud rock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Out T[onight]</td>
<td>Loud rock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Cool/Fool</td>
<td>Light acoustic guitar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. [A Little] Business</td>
<td>Loud comedy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Female [to Female]</td>
<td>Less rocking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. He Says</td>
<td>Acoustic guitar again</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. He Says B</td>
<td>[Illegible] calliope delay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Light [my] C[andle]</td>
<td>Light comedy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. [BLANK]</td>
<td>[BLANK]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. X-Mo #1</td>
<td>Light comedy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Message 2</td>
<td>Comedy acapella</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Fem[ale] to Female</td>
<td>Less rocking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Another Day</td>
<td>Big rock anthem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. X-Mo/Bummer</td>
<td>Light comedy / heavy guitar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Santa Fe</td>
<td>Jazz lite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. I’ll Cover You</td>
<td>Light rock-pop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Will I</td>
<td>Guitar/ big vocal build</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Male [to] Female</td>
<td>[BLANK]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Over It</td>
<td>Big rocker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Christmas Bells</td>
<td>Huge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. [BLANK]</td>
<td>[BLANK]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. La Vie [Boheme]</td>
<td>Jazzy – bass key piano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Coda</td>
<td>Orchestra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. I Sh[ould Tell You]</td>
<td>Small to big ballad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. Message #3</td>
<td>Accap[ella]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. Seas[ons of Love] B</td>
<td>Gospel again</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. W[ith]out You</td>
<td>Pop ballad key on guitar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. Contact</td>
<td>Tape big [Illegible]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35. G[ood]bye Love</td>
<td>Gospel/ rock ballad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36. [BLANK]</td>
<td>[BLANK]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37. Real Estate</td>
<td>Comedy musical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38. Open Road</td>
<td>Theater ballad heavy keys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39. Message #4</td>
<td>Comic accapell[a]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40. Finale</td>
<td>Boffo - Everything</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The entry “everything” for the finale implies that Larson considered reusing or combining musical styles used previously in the show. This annotation confirms the information in the other
sheet discussed above: pastiche or parody of everything was a possibility. Such a table demonstrates that Larson employed pastiche consciously to update the story of La Bohème to the 1990s by mixing musical styles with which his audience would have been familiar.

A drawing that Larson did in another sketchbook for Rent suggests his reason for using pastiche. Larson drew a bridge, an arrow followed by the words “gap bet. pop,” followed by two beamed sixteenth-notes plus the drawing of a stage with curtains pulled. It graphically conveys the composer’s intentions: to bridge the gap between pop music and theater. Although this is also undated, it comports with an interview that Larson gave to the New York Magazine in 1993. He explained that since college he had been writing “rock-based musicals” because he was a fan of both styles, from Kurt Cobain to Stephen Sondheim, and could not help combining them.

Three years later, in a New York Times interview with critic Anthony Tommasini, Larson said that he consciously used different musical styles of contemporary pop music to “flesh out different characters.” Thus Angel sings in “a very straightforward disco sound.” Collins is “a sort of jazzy, Tom Waits-y kind of guy.” Roger and Mimi “are more grunge.” Larson also claimed that Rent had the potential to “to bring musical theater to the MTV generation.”

Reception of Rent acknowledged the composer’s use of pastiche and its impact on the development of the American musical. Ben Brantley’s review for The New York Times is one of

---


the earliest sources that predicted the impact that Rent would have on the history of American musical theater. Brantley characterized the score as one “of breathtaking eclecticism” as it includes “rock, salsa, Motown, be-bop, and reggae”:

Larson, like his characters, is clearly a child of postmodernism. (This, after all is a show that rhymes curry vindaloo with Maya Angelou). But he ultimately avoids the style of brittle, defensive irony, with everything framed in quotation marks, [which] has become the hallmark of downtown theater in recent years. In fact, on one level, Rent is about breaking through the self-protective detachment, here embodied by both Roger and Mark, of a generation weaned on the archness of David Letterman and the blankness of Andy Warhol. Like such other recent works as Mr. Sondheim’s Passion and Nick Silver’s Raised in Captivity, this show directly addresses the idea of being cut off from feelings by fear. . . . Along with George C. Wolfe and Savion Glover’s Bring in ‘da Noise, Bring in ‘da Funk, this show restores spontaneity and depth of feeling to a discipline that sorely needs them. People who complain about the demise of the American musical have simply been looking in the wrong places.69

Michael Feingold applauded Larson’s use of pastiche and saw how it connected both with the story and Larson’s agenda:

The show’s pride is its varied vocabulary, its shift in tone always seeming to stem from the dramatic event, from who the people are and what they’re doing. When Mark and Joanne compare notes on Maureen in a goofy tango, or Collins indulges in wistful dreams of life out west to country blues harmonica, the characters are singing both their inner music and a sound that’s in the media-saturated air around them.70

Feingold concludes, “Salsa, rap, and reggae all play their part in a score built to reflect a multicultural community.” In contrast, John Heilpern believed that Larson’s innovations would be detrimental to the development of the musical: “Blasted by a sung-through rock, I find myself looking to the great tradition of the American musical, rooted in the perfect, balanced synthesis of score, narrative, and dance. The form and discipline of Rodgers and Hammerstein’s Carousel


isn’t a bad premise at all for the most ultramodern of musicals—if only to reverse all the rules.”71 He goes on to criticize Rent’s plot, narrative, and character development.

Pastiche of popular music in The Human Comedy, Hello Again, Rent, The Wild Party, and Caroline, or Change suggests two conclusions. First, musical theater has started interacting with other forms of entertainment in order to thrive in the postmodern era. Audiences experience pastiche through what Jameson labels the “de-differentiation” of the arts, that is, the collapse of the distinction between the arts. In a broad sense, Jameson argues that postmodernism is marked by the removal of difference between fields of spheres: “economics has come to overlap with culture: that everything, including commodity production and high and speculative finance, has become cultural; and culture has equally become profoundly economic or commodity oriented.”72 In the context of the arts, Jameson argues that postmodern art employs combinations of photography, performance, video, and sculpture that cannot be classified under any established term, concluding that “the generic universal of art itself has disintegrated, leaving in place the unclassifiable combinations we confront in an institutional space which alone confers on them the status of art.”73 Such a phenomenon has occurred as a consequence of the victory of capitalism in a globalized world and the engulfment of everything into mass media, which has led to the consumption of “the conjunction of elements, in what is, just like postmodern art itself, a unique event.”74 A postmodern art form is not experienced through one single aesthetic only, but by a confluence of aesthetics derived from different sources. As a result, different forms of


72 Jameson, “‘End of Art’ or ‘End of History,’” 73.


74 Ibid., 114–15.
media, which populate the entertainment industry, end up sharing the same aesthetic values and compete for audiences by drawing on what other media have to offer. Thus, the American musical has embraced different types of popular music through pastiche, just as it has adapted Hollywood films into “new” musicals, and television has in turn borrowed from musical theater for such shows as *Glee* and *Smash*. Because of de-differentiation, neither postmodern art nor postmodern entertainment are distinguished through clear-cut aesthetics, and audiences can realize how postmodern “unique events” blur the lines between a musical, a concert of popular music, and a television series.

If all differences collapse, it becomes easy to lose track of the references that separated different forms in the past. De-differentiation leads to a state of confusion as spectators no longer know what they experience. Jameson’s concept raises questions about genre that plagued the reception of the musicals considered in this chapter. Are the songs from *Rent* rock or show tunes? Is Lippa’s choice to use the electric guitar in a musical that takes place in the 1920s anachronistic? If some songs from *The Human Comedy* consist just of recitatives, while others are extremely tuneful, can the work not be classified as an operetta, cantata, or oratorio? If musicals like *Caroline, or Change*, *Hello Again*, *The Human Comedy*, *Rent*, and *The Wild Party* are sung from beginning to end, are they operas? Blurring the differences between book and lyrics, and book and score approximates the sung-through musical to opera. These questions arise exactly because musicals in the postmodern era do not rely just on aesthetics that the musical had by itself in the past. These musicals and their creative teams employ aesthetics of so

---

75 The relationship between popular music and television dates back to television’s early days, when it provided opportunities to big bands and vaudeville actors who sang popular songs, but because television required them to develop new means of performance, it made itself different from other media. In postmodernism the lines between medias have blurred, and one media borrows from or imitates the other. For more on this relationship, see Murray Forman, “‘One Night on TV Is Worth Weeks at the Paramount’: Musicians and Opportunity in Early Television, 1948–55,” *Popular Music* 21 (2002): 249–76.
many other forms of music and theater that they destroy aesthetic differences between musical and theatrical genres, allowing their audiences to experience musical theater as a new and unique event. In Jameson’s terms, sung-through musicals that employ pastiche are not musical theater in its natural and traditional form, but “abstractions of the natural.”

Second, if popular music left the theater in the 1950s and early 1960s, pastiche has allowed it to come back. This return reactivated the symbiotic relationship that musical theater and popular music enjoyed during the first half of the twentieth century, but on very different terms. Whether to characterize a plot’s time and place, to provide musical variety, or to bridge the gap between musical theater and popular music, the American musical imitates and recontextualizes styles of popular music that have developed independently from the theater. In turn, popular music can create and develop the styles and genres that can serve as raw materials to theater composers.

Pastiche is not the only means that has brought the American musical theater into the postmodern era. Parody has also contributed in such musicals as The Producers (2001), The Drowsy Chaperone (2006), Curtains (2007), The Book of Mormon (2011), and the epitome of parody, The Musical of Musicals: The Musical (2003), which satirizes the tradition from Rodgers and Hammerstein to Sondheim and Lloyd Webber. The development of musical theater subgenres, such as the megamusical and the jukebox musical, have established alternative ways to tell a story with the help of songs. Finally, other musicals have continued in the tradition of the Golden Age musical without resorting to either pastiche or parody, such as Kiss of the Spider Woman (1993), Beauty and the Beast (1994), Victor/Victoria (1995), The Scarlet Pimpernel (1997), Parade (1998), and Aida (2000). Musical theater composers may appear defensive when

the word pastiche is used to describe their scores, and critics may interpret and downplay their scores as “mere pastiche.” If done well, however, pastiche is a technique that requires not only great craft, but also art.
Conclusion

I think that what music and great lyrics can do is make life richer. You take a moment from life and you don’t know it’s great, you don’t know it’s as special as it is. Then you hear it sung and all of a sudden you have goosebumps and everything seems to have changed and the world seems different.¹

—William Finn

The 1953–1954 Broadway season, during the heyday of the American musical’s Golden Age, saw the opening of several book musicals: Carnival in Flanders, Kismet, By the Beautiful Sea, and The Pajama Game. It also introduced revivals of two musical theater evergreens, Show Boat and Oklahoma!; and hits from previous seasons were still playing, such as Guys and Dolls, The King and I, and Wonderful Town.² Amidst such profusion of book musicals, theater critic John Chapman reported on March 12, 1954 that the Off-Broadway musical The Golden Apple “lifts our Broadway song-and-dance theater right off the comfortable seat of its pants and then gives it a kick in said pants.”³ The critic’s praise derived from the fact that The Golden Apple succeeded in telling its story and communicating all of its dramatic action though songs alone, avoiding the alternation between spoken dialogue and song that characterizes the book musical.

¹ William Finn, “According to Finn: Song Notes Written by William Finn,” an insert accompanying the Playbill for the Off-Broadway musical Make Me a Song at New World Stages (Playbill, 123, no. 11 [November 2007]: unpaged).

² These three musicals, incidentally, closed during or shortly after that season. Guys and Dolls closed on November 28, 1953; The King and I on March 20, 1954; and Wonderful Town on July 3, 1954.

Another critic concurred with Chapman’s assessment, “The Golden Apple is some sort of milestone in the American musical theater.”

*The Golden Apple* reveals that sung-through musicals appeared in the American musical theater in the mid-1950s, years before the inception of the musicals selected for this study. This dissertation has demonstrated that after 1980, the sung-through musical became more prominent and helped it maintain its relevance in American culture at the end of the twentieth century. Indeed, the proliferation of sung-through musicals after 1980 has challenged and even reinvented the genre.

I address here the relevance and importance of this study by expanding the historical frame. First, I expand the context for the selected musicals’ presence in the history of the genre, showing that they were not the first ones to avoid the clear-cut alternation between spoken dialogue and song. Rather, they are part of a trend that have existed in the American musical theater, albeit not as prevalent and with less success before 1980. Second, I contextualize the musicals of this study in their own time by considering what else was happening both off and on Broadway during the time they were running in these two theatrical circuits. Finally, I discuss what happened to the forms proposed in this dissertation (the song-cycle and the embedded song structure) after *Carline, or Change* in 2004.

The three satirical operettas by George and Ira Gershwin of the early 1930s, *Strike Up the Band* (1927; 1930 on Broadway), *Of Thee I Sing* (1931), and *Let 'em Eat Cake* (1933), occupy a distinctive place in musical theater history because their songs developed most of the dramatic

---

action. These three works did not challenge as much as they helped to innovate the book musical by combining typical musical numbers of operetta (such as the sung-through finaletto) with elements of musical comedy. Through an Americanization of Gilbert and Sullivan operettas, these Gershwin operettas continued the strive for “integration” of songs and story that Show Boat had achieved in 1927. Strike Up the Band, for instance, featured soloists and choruses singing rhymed dialogues. Ira explained that in Of Thee I Sing: “There are no verse-and-chorus songs; there is a sort of recitative running along, and lots of finales and finalettos. . . . It is hard to sit down and stretch out some single song for thirty-two measures. That is what you do with the usual song. In this show you develop ideas, condensing pages of possible dialogue into a few lines of song.” Even though Strike Up the Band, Of Thee I Sing, and Let ’em Eat Cake were not sung-through, the structure of their scores was the closest that the American musical had gotten to this form by way of operetta aesthetics, developing most of their scenes through sung dialogue. As Deena Rosenberg concludes in her book on the partnership of George and Ira Gershwin: “The music in the trilogy does more than advance the action. It comments upon it, mocks it, deflates it; often, it is the action.”

Ira Gershwin, Moss Hart, and Kurt Weill’s musical Lady in the Dark (1941) differentiated itself from all other book musicals by limiting the sung passages to depict the protagonist’s unconscious. With the exception of “My Ship,” the songs and dances occur all in

---

5 Morrie Ryskind wrote the book for Strike Up the Band; Ryskind and George S. Kaufman wrote the book for Of Thee I Sing; and Kaufman wrote the book for Let ’em Eat Cake. The three works share a satirical agenda towards American politics and some of the main characters. They thus form a trilogy.


Eliza’s unconscious as she dreams or describes her dreams to her psychiatrist. The scenes that take place in her workplace consist of only spoken dialogue, as in a straight play. Using the difference between singing and speaking to portray the protagonist’s unconscious versus conscious world marks a precursor of what Jeffrey Lunden and Arthur Pearlman devised for Wings. Bruce McClung has explained how Kurt Weill’s score operated differently from the conventions of the book musical: “The variety of musical declamation enabled Weill to fashion sequences in which characters speak, recite on single notes, speak-sing on pitch, and sing short melodies, all interspersed with songs. The end result gives the sequences a continuous quality, adding to their operatic flavor.”

Ira Gershwin, the common denominator between those three satirical operettas of the 1930s and Lady in the Dark, played an important role in shaping these pieces of musical theater in an innovative way and seems to have done so consciously. In a letter in which he requested some musical passages from Weill, to which he could add lyrics, he revealed how his creative process shaped these musicals:

I don’t think I have any stray lyrics you can be fooling around with—much as I’d like to send you a batch. In nine cases out of ten I have written to music, or just have given a title and a couple of possible first lines. In the case of “Listening” [“I am Listening” was the working title for Lady in the Dark] as in Of Thee I Sing and Let ‘em Eat Cake, which were not song shows in the usual sense but combined song with recitative and patter, there should of course be some lyric matter written first.

Weill considered each of the dream sequences to be “little one-act operas,” and their continuous music foreshadowed aspects of the sung-through musical.

---

8 Bruce McClung, Lady in the Dark: Biography of a Musical (New York: Oxford University Press), 63. McClung also points out that Lady in the Dark adapted and lampooned different styles of operetta (Ibid., 61).

9 Ira Gershwin, typescript letter dated March 18, 1940 to Kurt Weil, quoted in ibid., 48.
The Golden Apple (1954), with music by Jerome Moross and lyrics by John Latouche, transferred Homer’s Iliad and Odyssey to the United States in the early twentieth century. Its structure, sung-through with rhymed couplets, led a critic to describe it as “a play in music, rather than a play with music.”¹⁰ The dramatic action develops mainly in a song-cycle structure with the few lines of dialogue in between also sung. The Golden Apple shows the influence of operas like the Gershwins’ Porgy and Bess and even Virgin Thomson’s Four Saint in Three Acts. Because The Golden Apple sits between opera and musical theater, its sung-through structure stands out as unusual in the history of the American musical. Author Dan Dietz claims, “Beginning in the 1970s and 1980s, sung-through musicals . . . became familiar fare to Broadway audiences, but this unconventional method of telling a musical story was virtually unheard of in the world of 1950s musical theater.”¹¹ Moross and Latouche’s ambitious work is perhaps the main precursor of the sung-through structure: a musical in the heyday of the American musical theater’s Golden Age that challenged the conventions of the genre by communicating its dramatic action entirely in song.

The Umbrellas of Cherbourg was a French/German 1964 movie that featured all lines of dialogue sung in recitative and song. Ethan Mordden’s description of Michel Legrand’s score is comparable to the embedded-song structure discussed in this dissertation: “Every line of dialogue [is sung], no matter how mundane, in a somewhat formless arioso that sometimes expand into a structured number.”¹² Director Andrei Serban and lyricist Sheldon Harnick


adapted *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* to the American musical stage in an Off-Broadway production at the Public Theater that ran from February 1 to March 4, 1979, concurrent with Finn’s first production of *In Trousers*, which played at Playwright Horizons from February 21 to March 18, 1979. Stephen Bogardus, who originated the role of Whizzer in the 1981 opening of *March of the Falsettos*, played Jean in the stage version of *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*. This Off-Broadway production was very successful, and rumor had it throughout the rest of the 1978–1979 season that it would move to Broadway. However, it never did. This sung-through musical never entered the standard American musical repertoire, but has found an audience in regional theaters in the United States and through two productions in London (1980 and 2011).

Galt MacDermot composed two sung-through scores before *The Human Comedy*, but the two Broadway musicals resulting from such effort flopped. *Dude*, which opened on October 9, 1972, reunited MacDermot with lyricist and book writer Gerome Ragni and director Tom O’Horgan, with whom the songwriter had worked in *Hair* in the late 1960s. The musical’s title refers to the main character, an unnamed everyman who is tempted by the forces of good and evil. Writer Ken Mandelbaum has claimed that this was “perhaps the most incomprehensible show ever presented on a Broadway stage, it was mostly sung, but its songs were barely related and could have been performed in any order or by any ‘character’ with the same result.” *Dude* played sixteen performances on Broadway before closing. *Via Galactica* opened on November

---

13 Lyricist Norman Gimbel, famous for writing English lyrics to international songs, such as Tom Jobim’s “The Girl from Ipanema,” created the lyrics for two songs of the movie after its release, “Watch What Happens” and “I Will Wait for You.” The latter was an Oscar nominee for best original song in 1966 and used in this stage adaptation. The original lyrics in French were by Jacques Demy.

14 Dietz, 471.

28, 1972 and was created by director Peter Hall. Christopher Gore penned the book and lyrics. MacDermot and Gore’s songs portrayed life on an asteroid in the year 2972. MacDermot was unlucky for the second time in the same season to provide the music for a confusing book, which the critics panned and the production closed after just eight performances. Mandelbaum argues that these sung-through flops had just one positive impact: “Dude and Via Galactica were two expensive embarrassments that actually had a salutary effect on musical theater. With their back-to-back awfulness, they put a quick end to the idea that rock would ‘save’ the Broadway musical.” Indeed, the American musical would have to wait until Rent to put an end to the discussion on whether rock music could structure a compelling dramaturgy.

Despite the more prominence of sung-through musicals on both Off-Broadway and Broadway circuits after 1980, this structure still did not predominate. Rather, the alternation of spoken dialogue and songs that characterizes the book musical and most of the tradition of the American musical theater continued to dominate. Both the sung-through format and the notion of challenging the structure of the book of a musical were exceptions.

A consideration of the recipients of Tony Awards for the categories of best original music and best musical between 1980 and 2004 confirms the dominance of the book musical over the sung-through musical on Broadway. The Human Comedy was not nominated for best musical nor best original score when it played on Broadway in 1984, and the musical that won these two categories that year was Jerry Herman’s La Cage aux Folles. William Finn received the Tony Award for best original score for Falsettos in 1992, but the musical lost the award for best musical to Crazy for You, a modern remake of the Gershwins’ 1930 musical Girl Crazy. Kushner

16 Ibid., 24.

17 The Tony Awards nominate and grant awards only to plays and musicals that open on Broadway during a given season.
and Tesori’s *Caroline, or Change* was nominated for those two categories in 2004, but lost both to *Avenue Q*. Only Jonathan Larson made history in this time period showing that a nearly sung-through musical that challenges the structural conventions of the book musical can beat conventional ones. In 1996 *Rent* won in both categories, prevailing over book musicals like *Big* and a stage version of Rodgers and Hammerstein’s film *State Fair*. *Rent*’s biggest competitor in both categories was George C. Wolfe’s *Bring in ’Da Noise, Bring in ’Da Funk*, which also challenged the book musical through extensive use of choreography and projected images to tell the history of African Americans from slavery to the 1990s.

It was the British sung-through musical that proved that musicals in this structure could dominate the Great White Way. *Evita*, *Cats*, and *Les Miserables* won Tony Awards in those two categories in 1980, 1983, and 1987, respectively. *The Phantom of the Opera* won best musical of the year in 1988, but Andrew Lloyd Webber lost the Tony for best original score to Stephen Sondheim’s *Into the Woods*. *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* and *Miss Saigon* were exceptions. The former lost both categories to Maury Yeston’s *Nine* in 1982. The latter lost both categories to a standard American musical comedy, *The Will Rogers Follies*, in 1991. Despite these loses, the reliance of these British megamusicals in state-of-the-art stagecraft and the impact that they had in both bringing tourism to Broadway and taking Broadway to the rest of the world helped implement the sung-through structure in the minds of musical theater audiences and fans.

This dissertation has shed light on the sung-through structure that *American* composers, lyricists, and book writers were creating when these British sung-through musicals were taking Broadway by storm. British and American sung-through musicals can be differentiated in three aspects. First, Americans did not conceive their sung-through musicals to rely on stagecraft.
American sung-through musicals were presented in much smaller scale and productions than the British ones. Second, all of the musicals in this study come from the Off-Broadway circuit, known for more daring works and unconventional productions than mainstream Broadway. Only four of the twelve transferred to Broadway, and two of these (The Human Comedy and Caroline, or Change) flopped. Third, this dissertation has demonstrated that the American sung-through musical does not make large use of contrafacta, i.e., reusing the same music in different scenes, but with different lyrics. In fact, contrafacta in the selected musicals occur only as reprises, like “Helluva Day” in In Trousers and Jason’s “Miracle of Judaism” and “Another Miracle of Judaism” in Falsettoland. Such use of contrafacta in reprises also occurs in the book musical, as I demonstrated in chapter 3. The American sung-through musical has simply continued this convention. Therefore, the reliance on contrafacta to organize and develop dramatic action should apply for the British sung-through megamusicals only.

On the Off-Broadway circuit, these American sung-through musicals received several awards for their quality, bringing attention to their unconventional structure. Galt MacDermot was nominated for a Drama Desk Award for outstanding music in The Human Comedy. Andrew Lippa, Jason Robert Brown, and Jeanine Tesori received Drama Desk Awards in this category in 2000, 2002, and 2004, respectively. March of the Falsettos and Falsettoland won the Outer Critics Circle Award for best Off-Broadway play in 1981 and 1991, respectively. The Wild Party received this award in 2000. Falsettoland won the 1991 Lucile Lortel Award for outstanding performance.

---

18 For more on the aesthetics of the Off-Broadway musical, see Larry Stempel, Showtime: A History of the Broadway Musical Theater (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010), 459–514; and Dietz, Off-Broadway Musicals, 1–4.

musical, and Finn received the Drama Desk Award for outstanding lyrics for this musical. *Wings, Hello Again,* and *The Wild Party* won at least one Obie Award each for their original productions. Indeed, the Off-Broadway circuit played an immense role in shaping and introducing the *American* sung-through musical to musical theater audiences and fans.

The dominance and even favoritism towards the structure of the conventional book musical can be explained by composer Michael John LaChiusa. In a controversial essay published in 2005, the composer makes a strong point that Broadway musicals survived in the 1990s and 2000s because musicals always imitate one another: “All sense of invention and craft is abandoned in favor of delivering what the audience thinks a musical should deliver.”

LaChiusa argues that the American book musicals of that time period are not a continuation or a development of a tradition. Rather, they are simulacra: copy of a copy of copy that lacks originality. Indeed, such lack of innovation and the practice of looking to and copying the past that LaChiusa criticizes also brings and contextualizes the American musical in the postmodern era. His argument against the creative process of Broadway musicals accounts for why American sung-through musicals prospered more Off-Broadway than on Broadway between 1980 and the early 2000s.

However, the sung-through musical has successfully continued to appear on Broadway and Off-Broadway in the twenty-first century. The compositional processes involving internal changes in songs and their order in a sung-through musical blurs the distinction between book and score, while keeping both essential to the structure. Five sung-through musicals after *Caroline, or Change* have focused on achieving such structural integration. They continue to

---

experiment with musical theater as a genre, challenging its forms and conventions. These musicals have included both song-cycle and embedded-song structures.

*American Idiot* (2010) tells the story of three young men coming of age in the United States of the early twentieth-first century. It is a stage adaptation of the punk rock band Green Day’s eponymous album from 2004, some songs from their then recent album *21st-Century Breakdown*, and the single “When It’s Time.” The band conceived both albums as rock operas, following the lead of The Pretty Things’s *S.F. Sorrow* in 1968 and The Who’s *Tommy* from 1969. Billie Joe Armstrong (Green Day’s vocalist and guitarist) and Michael Mayer’s book develops in a song-cycle structure with a thin plot. The songs reveal more about the character’s minds and conflicts than their actions. The only snippets of spoken language occur between some songs, when the main character, Johnny, writes in his journal about his experience of fleeing life in the suburbs and what he encounters in the city. The musical erases the line between show tunes and pop music and between Broadway musical theater and a rock concert.

*Natasha, Pierre, and the Great Comet of 1812* (2012) turns Leo Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* into a sung-through Off-Broadway musical that features forty-two songs.²¹ Dave Malloy wrote music, lyrics, and the book, which drops the audience in the middle of one of the plots from Tolstoy’s novel. The dramatic action develops in a song-cycle structure, and most of the songs fit the category of musical scenes with sung-dialogue and the chorus narrating the action, describing characters and plot. The musical also features soliloquy songs, like Pierre’s “I am song” (“Pierre”) and Natasha’s “No One Else.” Malloy reserves the only line of spoken dialogue for the musical’s final scene when Pierre consoles Natasha in their only scene together, immediately before the comet passes. This dramatic context gives the spoken line strength in a sung-through

---

²¹ The musical opened on Broadway on November 14, 2016.
score, not unlike Kushner and Tesori’s spoken passages in *Caroline, or Change*. At the climax of the musical, singing is no longer enough to express their feelings, so the protagonists resort to speaking.\(^{22}\)

*Natasha, Pierre, and the Great Comet of 1812* also employs pastiche as a dramatic device. The critic of *The New York Post* pointed out, “The story is told in a series of inventive songs that go from klezmer stomp to country-fried ballad to plaintive torch song.”\(^{23}\) Malloy also created *Preludes* (2015), a musical that mixes some of Rachmaninoff’s compositions with Malloy’s original music to portray the Russian composer’s state after the devastating premiere of his first symphony in 1897. While not sung-through, continuous music and references to Rachmaninoff’s music challenge the distinction between book and score that conventionally characterizes the American musical.

*Murder Ballad* (2013) uses the sung-through format to expand a genre of popular balladry into a piece of musical theater. Julia Jordan’s book tells the story of Sara and the love triangle in which she finds herself after leaving downtown Manhattan to become a wife and mother uptown. Indie rock songwriter Juliana Nash wrote music and lyrics, which rely heavily on pop-rock idioms. To fulfill its genre of a murder ballad, Jordan created a narrator who intervenes throughout the story, reporting on the dramatic action to the audience and reminding them that someone will die by the end of the story. The structure approximates the embedded-song structure, blending short passages of spoken dialogue with musical climaxes around a series of songs. Nash makes extensive use of the interrupted song technique. The song “Prattle,” for

\(^{22}\) This is also similar to the finale of *West Side Story*, where Leonard Bernstein gave up trying to set Maria’s final speech to music.

instance, occurs in six different moments of the musical. “Narrator” occurs eleven times to help develop the dramatic action. Jordan and Nash sprinkle these songs in the musical’s song order similarly to “All in All” in Wings and “Happy New Year” in Rent. Like the Marvin musicals of the 1980s and Hello Again, Murder Ballad was a sung-through Off-Broadway musical.

Jeanine Tesori returned to the embedded-song structure for the musical Fun Home. Based on Alison Bechdel’s graphic novel, this musical’s story centers on the author’s discovery of her sexuality while dealing with her closeted father. Lisa Kron penned the lyrics and a book that presents the protagonist in three phases of her life: childhood, college years, and adult Alison, a comics strip writer who narrates the action as she reflects on her past and tries to see her relationship with her parents from their perspective. The musical’s structure follows that of Caroline, or Change with songs surrounded by short spoken dialogue, short song passages and reprises, underscoring, and constant alternation of spoken and sung lines. Director Sam Gold joined the creative team because he admired the process of adapting a graphic novel into a musical and how Kron and Tesori moved away from the conventions of the book musical: “[They] never relied on convention to tell the story, [they] were constantly inventing the form as [they] wrestled with the material.” Kron recals that blurring the differences between book and score occurred during the compositional process: “I had to learn . . . that lyrics are not dialogue set to music. It’s hard to say exactly what they are; it’s a bit mysterious. But in our early days working together, I’d hand Jeanine a page of writing, and she’d scan through it murmuring, ‘not a lyric…not a lyric…not a lyric’ and then she’d circle a pair of lines and say, ‘that’s a lyric.’”

---

24 Fun Home opened Off-Broadway, at the Public Theater, on October 22, 2013 and closed on January 12, 2014. It played on Broadway from April 19, 2015 until September 10, 2016.

25 Sam Gold, Lisa Kron, and Jeanine Tesori, interview published in the souvenir program for the original Broadway run of Fun Home, 9.

26 Ibid.
The musical’s structure also caught the attention of critics. David Rooney of *The Hollywood Reporter* wrote, “While the melodic stretches of Tesori’s *Fun Home* score are interspersed with almost as many abstract passages or semi-spoken songs, it’s the organic fusion of these elements with the domestic drama that makes it so affecting.”

The smash hit *Hamilton* also extended the life of the sung-through musical. As it tells the story of Alexander Hamilton, from childhood to death, the musical develops from song to song. The majority of songs and intervening parts communicate and enact the dramatic action with rap music, which by definition employs rhythmic and rhyming speech, which enabled the composer, Lin-Manuel Miranda, to pack an immense number of words, and quantity of information and dramatic action in the course of a single song. Miranda has claimed that the musicals that influenced him during his compositional process were *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Les Misérables*, and *Rent*, all sung-through musicals. Similar to *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *Evita* (both originally concept albums), *Hamilton* started out as a collection of songs titled *The Hamilton Mixtape*, from which more songs and the plot emanated as Miranda created the musical. As it happened with Finn and Larson, the sung-through format developed naturally. After he completed some songs for the main structure of Act I, Miranda realized, “If you start with our opening number, you can’t go back to speech. The ball is thrown too high in the air.”

---


30 Ibid. The musical has one scene near the end of Act I that is not musicalized, “Tomorrow There’ll Be More of Us.”
*Hamilton, Fun Home,* and the musicals of Dave Malloy have caused *The New York Times* theater critic to announce, “the American musical is not only not dead but also growing luxuriantly in places you never expected.”

In addition to these new musicals, the ones considered in this study have appeared in regional theaters throughout the United States. Because of their one-act structure and small cast, *Wings, Hello Again,* and *The Last Five Years* have been good candidates for non-profit theaters. *Caroline, or Change* has been produced in regional theaters, too. It became popular on the West Coast after the original Caroline and Emmie, Tonya Pinkins and Anika Noni Rose, reprised their roles in Los Angeles and San Francisco in 2004 and 2005. The musicals of this study continue to be produced in touring productions (as Rent’s 20th Anniversary Tour in 2016), revisals (both *A New Brain* and *The Wild Party* were considerably rewritten for short runs in the summer of 2015 at the New York City Center Encores! series), and revivals (such as the Lincoln Center 2016 production of *Falsettos*). The relevance of these sung-through musicals’ subject matter have continued their performances into the twenty-first century.

To return to the question that Thomas Nostradamus and Nick Bottom mockingly pose in *Something Rotten!*: why do not the characters of sung-through musicals talk? Why sing every line? The answer has phenomenological roots: breaking into song constitutes a means through which humans can experience an event and achieve emotional catharsis. We break into song to cope with tragedy. “The Johnstown Flood” ballad helped Americans come to terms with the circumstances generated by this 1889 disaster in Pennsylvania. A large number of songwriters have used their craft to sing about the pain and anger caused by the 9/11terror attacks, such as Tori Amos’s “I Can’t See New York” (2002), Sheryl Crow’s “Good Bless This Mess” (2008),

---

and Bruce Springsteen 2002 album *The Rising*, whose songs depict the tragedy from various perspectives. The Broadway community has come together to support the victims of national tragedies, such as the singing of John Kander and Fred Ebb’s “Theme from New York, New York” after 9/11 on Duffy Square in 2001 and 2011, and the recording of Burt Bacharach and Hal Davis’s “What the World Needs Now Is Love” in June of 2016 after the Orlando nightclub shooting.

We also break into song to celebrate and express life events, as evinced by singing “Happy Birthday.” Religious rites have always used singing to express devotion and gratitude. The singing of national anthems celebrates patriotism. Breaking into song is a shared human activity. The American musical theater has expanded singing to depict, reflect upon, and deepen the human experience in a story enacted on a stage. The sung-through musical has expanded this practice: communicating a story entirely, or nearly entirely, in song.
Bibliography

Primary Sources


Secondary Sources


Appendix A

This appendix lists the twelve shows selected for my study in chronological order, the names of the creative team, and a plot synopsis for each.

_In Trousers_ (1979; revised in 1981 and 1985)

Music, lyrics, and book by William Finn. It tells the story of Marvin and his struggles to understand and accept his sexuality. The musical alternates between the present (when married and with a son, he realizes he prefers to be with men) and Marvin’s past (when he recollects his high school sweetheart, Miss Goldberg—his English teacher in high school—and his first sexual experience with a man named Whizzer). The songs about his past also reveal that he was spoiled. While evaluating his teenage years, he remembers the story of Christopher Columbus and Amerigo Vespucci’s arrival in America. In his imagination, Columbus named the New World America because he had an affair with Vespucci. Marvin thus realizes that homosexuality has always been part of his desires and sexual identity. He finally decides that he will enter relationships with men only.

The title of the musical refers to gender identification. As Marvin explores his past and present he begins to accept that he is interested in people in trousers (men) more than people in dresses (women). The three ladies who accompany Marvin throughout begin the musical dressed in trousers. As they perform the first song, they “reveal their dresses underneath” and “play the remainder of the show in these dresses.”

Clothing was so crucial in enhancing the gender issues discussed in the musical that the original production listed the characters based on what they wore: with the pink shirt (the wife), with the blond hair (the high school sweetheart), with the sunglasses (Ms. Goldberg), and with the sneakers (Marvin).

_March of the Falsettos_ (1981)

Music and lyrics by William Finn, book by William Finn and James Lapine. This is a sequel to _In Trousers_. Marvin leaves his wife (now named Trina) and son (now named Jason) to live with Whizzer. Marvin still struggles with self-acceptance, complicating his relationship with Whizzer and making him feel disconnected from Jason. He suggests that Trina should talk to his psychiatrist, Mendel. She does, and Mendel falls in love with her. Marvin and Trina want Jason to see a psychiatrist too, so he can help the boy with the changes in the family. The boy agrees but only if the psychiatrist come to him. As Mendel starts visiting, his relationship with Trina develops until he proposes to her. Meanwhile, Marvin and Whizzer’s relationship does not go very well as they struggle to come to terms with their differences. Marvin’s patriarchal values irritate Whizzer, who decides to leave him. Marvin gets even more frustrated when he hears that his ex-wife is marrying his psychiatrist. At the end of the musical, Marvin’s relationships with Whizzer and Trina are both shattered. However, he makes amends to Jason, explaining that

---


understanding and accepting one’s sexuality is something that every man has to go through, and so will Jason as he grows up. The musical thus explores how men (and boys) struggle to find their voices in a society in which the definition of masculinity has rarely been questioned.

*The Human Comedy* (1983)

Music by Galt MacDermot, lyrics and book by William Dumaresq. Based on William Saroyan’s 1943 film and subsequent novel of the same title, this is the story of Homer Macaulay, a young boy who works as a telegram messenger in the fictitious town of Ithaca, California, in the early days of World War II. He lives with his widowed mother, and two siblings, his sister, Bess, and the youngest of the Macaulay children, Ulysses. Homer’s older Brother, Marcus, is in Europe fighting in the war. Homer starts working at Spangler’s telegraph office everyday after school to help his mother with income. Spangler and Mr. Grogan (an elderly alcoholic man) receive the telegraphs, and Homer delivers them through the town. The messages he has to deliver, however, bring images and impacts of the war to his little town and to his everyday activities. The job helps him grow up and understand the hardships of life. His little brother, Ulysses, is too young to understand the war, but as he explores his little hometown, he starts questioning the meaning of everything around him.

Marcus befriends Toby and promises him that when they come back to the United States his family will be Toby’s too. Diana Steed is Spangler’s girlfriend and comes to visit the office. She is richer than him, and Spangler is shy to go meet her parents. Spangler and Diana’s relationship represents something happy that happens in Ithaca despite the war. Mr. Grogan receives a telegraph to communicate the Macaulay family that Marcus has died in action. The news is so devastating to Mr. Grogan that he has a heart attack and dies. Homer arrives to get the messages to deliver that day and finds Mr. Grogan dead. He reads the telegraph message and learns about Marcus’s death. Spangler arrives and consoles the boy, as he questions why he has to go through so much and who is to be blamed for the unfortunate events in his life. Some time later, Toby arrives at the Macaulay family’s house and tells them how much Marcus helped him during the war. Homer invites Toby to enter the house and celebrate the arrival of the soldier coming from the war as if Toby were Marcus. The Macaulay family accepts Toby as an adopted son and brother.

*Falsettoland* (1990)

Music and lyrics by William Finn, book by William Finn and James Lapine. The third and last musical in the Marvin trilogy takes place after the events of *March of the Falsettos*. Trina and Mendel are married, and Jason lives with them. Charlotte and Cordelia, a lesbian couple, are Marvin’s friends and Jason’s godparents. Charlotte is a doctor, and Cordelia is a chef specialized in Jewish cuisine. Trina, Mendel, Marvin, Charlotte, and Cordelia go see Jason play baseball. Whizzer arrives and joins them after Jason’s request, and Marvin and Whizzer see each other for the first time since their breakup. They start talking again and soon are back together. Trina and Marvin cannot agree with anything regarding the preparation for Jason’s bar mitzvah. The boys remains annoyed by his parents fights and threatens that he will not be bar mitzvahed. Charlotte arrives home and explains to Cordelia that something bad is happening at the hospital. This something is a virus that has been found and is spreading quickly. The next song shows
Marvin and Whizzer playing racquetball, and Whizzer gets weak and out of breath during the game and is taken to the hospital. Jason decides to wait until Whizzer is better to have his bar mitzvah. Mendel and Trina explain that Whizzer may not get better. Jason cannot make up his mind and prays for Whizzer’s health. After Charlotte announces that the virus continues to spread, Whizzer comes to terms with his mortality and accepts his fate. Jason enters and says that he will have his bar mitzvah in Whizzer’s hospital room, so he can be part of it. All others arrive, and as the bar mitzvah happens, Whizzer gets weak and unable to follow. Charlotte takes him out of the room. In the last song of the musical, Whizzer is no longer wearing hospital garments, but his regular clothes. He and Whizzer sing about how different their lives would have been had they not met each other.

*Falsettos* (1992)

Music and lyrics by William Finn, book by William Finn and James Lapine. *Falsettos* is the combination of *March of the Falsettos* and *Falsettoland* (both one-act musicals) as acts I and II, respectively. *Falsettos* covers Marvin’s story from his divorce to Whizzer’s death.

*Wings* (1993)

Music by Jeffrey Lunden, book and lyrics by Arthur Pearlman. Based on Arthur Kopit’s play of the same name, *Wings* centers on Emily Stilson, a victim of a stroke that left her with aphasia (the loss of the ability to express speech). The musical opens with Emily listening to the song “The New Daredevils of the Air,” which used to be played to accompany her when she was a young aviatrix who walked on the wings of her family’s biplane. She has a stroke in the middle of the song, and the dramatic action moves to the hospital in the second song in the musical. The songs alternate between the hospital and Emily’s mind, where she can sing about her memories, thoughts, and frustrations for being victim of aphasia. In the first half of this one-act musical, the other characters are the doctor, a nurse who attends to Emily, and Amy, a music therapist specialized in aphasia treatment. When Emily shows signs of recovery, Amy asks her if she remembers life before the stroke. Emily sings of a dream that she has had, in which she walks on wings and can feel the wind and see the sky. When Amy informs her that her son will bring a picture of when she was younger, Emily remembers that she used to fly on wings.

The second part of the musical centers on Emily’s rehabilitation. She meets other victims of aphasia, including Billy, a cook who sings about his recipe for cheesecake, but struggles to pronounce the words correctly. During a therapy section, Amy plays the song “Let Me Call You Sweetheart” on her accordion and has her patients all singing with her. This helps Emily remember the song “The New Daredevils of the Air.” Amy asks Emily’s son to bring a recording of that song, and once Emily listens to it she remembers her younger days and the process that she had to go through before walking on wings. Some time later, it is winter, and Emily is able to communicate better than any other time after the stroke. However, during a conversation with Amy, Emily has a relapse and dies. The dramatic action does not show her death. Instead, it goes back to Emily’s mind, where she sings that she has left her body and soars on wings.
Hello Again (1993)

Music, lyrics, and book by Michael John LaChiusa. Based on Arthur Schnitzler’s 1897 play La Ronde, the musical dramatizes ten characters pairing up in ten different scenes of sexual encounters. A character from one scene moves on to the next, seemingly breaking up with the old partner in favor of a new one. LaChiusa innovated on Schnitzler’s plot by making each scene happen in a different decade of the twentieth century. Thus, scene one shows a sexual encounter between a whore and a soldier in circa 1900. Scene two shows the soldier and a nurse in the 1940s. Scene three shows the nurse and a college boy in the 1960s. Scene four has the college boy meeting with a Young Wife during a movie showing in the 1930s. In scene five, the Young Wife has a sexual encounter with her husband in the 1950s. Scene six shows the husband meeting the Young Thing (a young adult in his twenties) aboard the Titanic in 1912. Scene seven shows the Young Thing meeting a writer in the 1970s. Scene eight shows the writer having a sexual encounter with an activist in the 1920s. Scene nine shows the activist having a love affair with a senator in the 1980s. The last scene shows the senator in the 1990s talking to the whore of scene 1 after they slept together. The new character in a scene is always the seduced, while the one from the previous scene is always the seducer. LaChiusa discarded chronological order and used music as the main means to help the audience identify the decade in which each scene takes place.

Rent (1996)

Music, lyrics, and book by Jonathan Larson. Loosely based on Puccini’s La Bohème, Rent is set in New York’s East Village of the early 1990s. The musical follows a year in the life of eight young bohemian artists struggling to overcome poverty and physical and emotional complications in the age of AIDS (four of them have HIV). Roger, a young musician, is still coping with the fact that his ex-girlfriend killed herself after telling him they both were HIV positive. He struggles to find a song that will be his last song ever, since he may die anytime. Roger’s roommate, Mark, is a filmmaker and has recently been dumped by Maureen, who is now dating another woman, Joanne. Their friend Collins come to visit on Christmas Eve, but is robbed before entering the building. Angel, a street drummer, comes to Collins’s help. Mimi, Roger and Mark’s neighbor, knocks on their door asking for candle light after electricity in the building went out. Mimi meets Roger, and through their dialogue Mimi reveals that she is a nightclub dancer and heroin user. Collins arrives and introduces Roger and Mark to Angel, a drag queen. Benny is an old friend of them and now married to a woman whose father owns the lot where the bohemians live. He comes to charge rent, but states that he can forgo it if Mark and Roger stop Maureen’s protest against him. They refuse his offer. Collins and Angel go to a life support group meeting, and Mark helps Maureen with the equipment for her protest. Mimi enters Roger’s apartment and invites him to go out with her. He refuses and sends her away. After the life support group meeting, Collins and Angel meet with Mark to go to Maureen’s protest. Roger decides to leave the lot, meets Mimi in the street, apologizes, and invites her to go out with his friends. Maureen’s protest is a success, and they all celebrate it at a café afterwards. Benny arrives and since Roger and Mark did not stop the protest or pay rent, they will have to leave the lot. Benny belittles their life styles and artistic values. They all ridicule Benny by singing a song.
that celebrates the bohemian life. Roger finds out that Mimi, too, is HIV-positive, and they kiss as the first act ends.

The second act focuses on these characters’ lives through the next year. It opens with a New Year’s Eve party, in which we learn that Mark’s film of Maureen’s protest generated some interest among journalists. Benny, who had padlocked the lot so Mark and Roger could no go inside, comes and decides to make amends. He returns the lot’s key to them and asks Mark to capture it on video. They all soon realize he is doing this just to protect his image in the East Village. Benny says that Mimi looked for his help and asked him to return the key. ImPLYING that he and Mimi had some relationship in the past, Benny says that he is doing it per her request. Maureen decides to put on another protest, but she cannot agree with any of Joanne’s suggestions, causing them to fight all the time. By the spring, Mark keeps receiving offers to work at a corporate job. Mimi and Roger’s relationship is affected by his jealousy of Benny and her addiction to heroin. Collins nurses Angel, whose health has been declining because of AIDS. Time moves to the fall, and Angel dies. Following the funeral, Mark decides to take the corporate job, and Roger decides to leave New York and Mimi. As they embark on their new lives, Mark has the idea of making a movie in Angel’s memory, and Roger finally finds his song as he misses Mimi. Mark quits his corporate job to work on his film, and Roger returns to New York. By this time, it is Christmas Eve again, and Mark and Roger are back in the lot in the East Village just like they were at the opening of the musical. Collins visits and gives them money, which he got after reprogramming an ATM to provide money for those with the code A-N-G-E-L. Maureen and Joanne arrive carrying Mimi, who is very weak and sick. As Mimi starts to fade, Roger grabs his guitar and plays the new song that he wrote for her. To Roger’s desperation, Mimi looks dead, but as the song ends, she awakens and tells them that she was heading towards a light, but Angel appeared and told her to listen to the song that Roger wrote for her. They all celebrate the message of the musical, “no day but today,” as Mark projects his film for everybody in the theater to see. In Rent, Larson treats themes like gender, infidelity, and death as all the protagonists fight to have their bohemian ideals seen and heard through their art (music, film, dance, theater, and fashion).

A New Brain (1998)

Music and lyrics by Willian Finn, book by William Finn and James Lapine. Based on Finn’s own experience with a brain surgery, this musical tells the story of Gordon, a composer who writes music for a TV show hosted by Gordon’s boss, Mr. Bungee. Gordon is very dissatisfied with his job and the types of songs he is required to compose. He goes to each lunch with his friend Rhoda, when he collapses with his face in his ziti. In the hospital, the doctor and two nurses (Richard and Nancy) explain to Rhoda and Gordon’s mother that there is something in his brain blocking the passage of fluids. Gordon’s boyfriend, Roger, takes longer to arrive because he enjoys sailing, and this is what he was doing when Gordon collapsed. Gordon has an M.R.I, which reveals that he will have to go through brain surgery in order to unblock the flow of fluids. That night, Rhoda announces that Mr. Bungee called and asked Gordon to finish the “Yes” song for the TV show. Gordon realizes that this may be his last song and asks Roger to leave him alone to finish the song. It is revealed that Mr. Bungee detested Gordon’s lyrics and asked his son to compose another song to replace Gordon’s. Meanwhile, Gordon’s mother goes to his apartment to clean it. She is convinced that reading all the books that she finds there
caused his brain to block. She throws all of his books away. The surgery happens the next day, and Gordon is in a coma, during which time he hallucinates and sees Roger, Rhoda, the nurse Richard, his mother, and Mr. Bungee singing songs that he wrote for them. In his last hallucination, he sees Mr. Bungee telling him not to give in, and Gordon awakens from the coma.

Throughout the musical, a homeless lady appears begging for change. When Roger gives her dollar bills, she becomes angry because she wants change. Her solo song in the middle of the musical explores this word pun. After Gordon’s surgery, she comforts Roger and helps him face a difficult situation. At the end of the show she appears selling books. She is happy that some change has happened in her life. Gordon and Roger run into her in the street, and Gordon realizes that she has his entire library, which his mother had thrown away. They beg her to return the books, but she insists on charging two dollars for each. Realizing that they will not pay, she runs away with the books. Gordon takes this opportunity to start his life anew now that he has a new brain. If the surgery and a life-threatening experience changed his attitude toward life, the homeless lady’s taking his books away proved to be the first chance outside the hospital for him to start anew.


Music, lyrics, and book by Andrew Lippa. Based on Joseph Moncure March’s 1928 narrative poem *The Wild Party*, this musical is set in New York City of the late 1920s and tells the story of Queenie and Burrs, two vaudevillian actors whose marriage is not going so well. One morning, after Burrs is violent to Queenie, she decides to host a party to provoke and hurt Burrs in return. He agrees with the idea of a party, for it would change their routine and revive their relationship. Among the guests are Madelaine True, a lesbian; the couple Eddie and Mae, he a thug and she a dimwit; and the lovers (and also brothers) Oscar and Phil D’Armano. Queenie’s friend Kate arrives with her new lover, Black. Queenie decides to use Black to provoke Burrs’s jealousy. Kate reveals that this was precisely her plan: Queenie would be taken by Black, and she could make her own move on Burrs. As the party goes on, Black begins to really like Queenie and pities her marriage to such a brute like Burrs. Kate tries to seduce Burrs, but he confides that there is something about Queenie that fascinates him.

In the second act, Black explains to Queenie that he is from Chicago, has recently arrived in New York, and is attracted to her. Burrs enters and apologizes to Queenie. Caught between the two men, Queenie cannot say yes to either and leaves. Burrs becomes desperate and mistakes Mae for Queenie and attacks her. Eddie comes to her rescue and beats Burrs, who is saved as Black hits Eddie with a chair. Kate tends to Burrs until he passes out. Black decides to leave, but now Queenie is attracted to him, too, and she takes him to her bedroom, where they sleep together. Burr wakes up the next day and looks for Queenie. He finds her in the bedroom with Black. He finds a gun in the bedroom and orders Queenie to make a decision between him and Black. He threatens to kill them and even himself. Black grabs Burrs and the gun goes off during their fight. Burrs fall dead, and Queenie begs Black to leave. He sings about his admiration for her and leaves. Having achieved what she wanted (to provoke Burrs), Queenie realizes her game went out of control and finds herself alone. The musical ends with Queenie leaving the apartment under the eyes of all of her guests.
The Last Five Years (2002)

Music, lyrics, and book by Jason Robert Brown. This one-act musical chronicles the five years Cathy and Jamie’s relationship. Jamie tells the story in chronological order, starting with the day they met, whereas Cathy starts with the break-up and goes backwards in time. Their timelines intersect in the middle of the show, when both sing about their wedding. Jamie comes from a Jewish family from New York City. He is a writer and gets his first book published at the age of twenty-three, around the same time that he meets Cathy. Throughout the five years of their relationship, Jamie turns out to be a very successful writer. Cathy comes from an unspecified city on the East Coast. She is an actress and moved to New York to pursue a career in musical theater. However, she is not as successful as Jamie. During those same five years, she does not get the jobs that she wants in New York, just the same summer theater camp in Ohio. Jamie proposes to Cathy one day in Central Park, where they also get married. The years that follow see Cathy struggling even more with her career, while Jamie struggles with the idea of living in a monogamous relationship. They slowly grow apart, although Cathy remains hopeful. Jamie breaks up the relationship through a note that leaves on her desk before leaving the apartment.

Caroline, Or Change (2003)

Music by Jeanine Tesori, lyrics and book by Tony Kushner. Set in Lake Charles, Louisiana in 1963, the action centers on the Gellman family and Caroline Thibodeaux, their African American maid. Caroline is a single mother who struggles to give her children a good life. She has four children: Larry, Emmie, Jackie, and Joe. Larry is fighting in Vietnam and is never seen during the musical. While waiting for the bus to go back home after work, Caroline meets her friend Dotty, who informs that her employer allows her to leave early so she can attend school. Caroline’s defensiveness makes Dotty believe that Caroline has changed over the years and become less friendly. Dotty also tells Caroline about the copper statue of a confederate soldier downtown that went missing. The bus arrives and announces that President Kennedy has been assassinated, shocking Caroline and Dotty. Later that day, Caroline talks to Emmie, who does not appear moved by Kennedy’s death, but enthusiastic about Civil Right for African Americans.

The Gellmans are Jewish, and the family consists of Stuart (a widowed man who spends his time practicing his clarinet), his son Noah, and his new wife, Rose, who was Stuart’s first wife’s best friend. Stuart parent’s (grandpa and grandma Gellman) visit regularly and tell Noah that his mother played the bassoon and formed a nice duet with their son. Caroline develops a friendship with Noah, who does not like Rose. Noah sees Caroline as his only friend in the house. Rose gets annoyed that Noah leaves changes in his pockets. She wants to teach him the importance of not wasting money and tells Caroline to keep the change that Noah leaves in his pockets (so they do not go into the laundry machine). Caroline first rejects the idea, but as she realizes that her own children need food and clothing, Larry is far away, Emmie is involved in fights for Civil Rights, and the president is dead, she concludes that the change can help. Noah realizes that by leaving change in his pockets, he can help the Thibodeaux family have a better
life. Act I ends with the Thibodeaux children imagining what they will do with some extra change and Noah fantasizing how they thank him for the change.

In the second act, Rose’s father, Mr. Stopnick, visits from New York for the Chanukah party. Dotty and Emmie go help Caroline in the kitchen during the party. At dinner, Mr. Stopnick questions Martin Luther King’s success with Civil Rights and meets resistance in Emmie, who argues that he would not understand an issue that concerns Southern, Christian African Americans. Embarrassed by her daughter’s behavior, Caroline orders Emmie to leave. When Caroline confronts Emmie in the kitchen, Emmie says that she spoke her mind because she does believe that Civil Rights will provide her with a better life than Caroline’s. Mr. Stopnick gives Noah a twenty-dollar bill, but the next morning at school, Noah realizes that he forgot it in his pocket in the laundry basket. If Caroline finds it, she can keep it. When he arrives home, he asks her for the bill, and Caroline says that the money is hers now. Noah gets infuriated and offends her based on her race. Caroline replies and offends him based on his religion. Caroline leaves the money in the bleach cup and refuses to go back to work or take calls from Rose for five days. Rose and Stuart cannot understand why Caroline refuses to come back.

On Sunday morning, before going to church, Caroline sees Dotty on her porch. Dotty tells Caroline that Rose wants to know whether or not Caroline has quit the job. Caroline finds herself making an important decision: whether she wants to remain a maid to a white family or embrace the changes around her. She concludes that she cannot afford to change. She has been challenged to accept changes, but she is not strong enough to do so. She cannot quit her job and risk her children’s future to adopt the changes for which Emmie fights.

In the epilogue, Emmie comes onstage alone and reports that she was one of the people who removed the statue of the confederate soldier. She was afraid of breaking the law, but she is the daughter of a maid who has worked really hard for very little in return, and believes that it is time for a change.
Appendix B

Interviews with William Finn

This appendix contains the transcripts of the three interviews that I conducted with William Finn. They appear below in chronological order.

Interview with William Finn, May 21, 2013, New York, NY.

Alexandre Bâdue (AB): How autobiographical are the Marvin shows?

William Finn (WF): I tell my students that they either better write from life or better sound like they’re writing from life. So the fact that people think Falsettos is autobiographical…[silence]

AB: Well, yes, I mean, Marvin gets married, he has a kid.

WF: None of those ever happened to me! I mean, temperamentally everyone thinks Marvin is totally self-absorbed, I find him charming. This is just a failure of mine, I think.

AB: I’m just honestly fascinated by how you write…

WF: I don’t know how I did it. I don’t know. And I just saw a very good production of it in Toronto, and I’d never seen a good production.

AB: of Falsettos?

WF: Of Falsettos. It’s a very hard show to do. And I saw a marvelous production in Toronto. But I don’t know how I wrote it. I really don’t know how I wrote it. And, you know, I wrote three musicals when I was in college at Williams College, and they may have got better in three years, but they weren’t really good. I mean, I can see now they were talented, you know, but then only five years later I wrote March of the Falsettos, and I don’t know how I did it. I think I was so desperate to become well-known that I just worked myself to the bottom. I just wrote way over my head. And I’ve only done that one other time in Elegies, which I think is pretty much my best work. And that was out of grief. But the first one I think was out of desperation.

AB: Why are the Marvin musicals sung-through?

WF: At Williams College I used to write book and music. And finally, in my third year this teacher Mr. [John] Savacool—he was a man of the theater, he was French and taught French—he kind of took me on this little project and he said, “You know, whenever you write lyrics, they’re very good.” He said, “Whenever you write book, it’s very, very bad.” And I said, “Well, do you think I just have to work harder writing book?” He said, “Oh, no,” he said, “You obviously work hard, you work hard, you’re just not good at it, you don’t hear it. And it’s like, the lyrics are so
natural and the book so bad.” He said, “Just write what you’re good at.” And since I didn’t know how to write a book, that’s why I wrote all sung. It’s not like I wanted to write all sung.

AB: One of the things that I like the most in the Marvin musicals is that the characters don’t speak, they sing the whole time.

WF: Well, that’s just because it’s what I can do!

AB: In In Trousers, too?

WF: Yeah, it was for In Trousers first, and then March of the Falsettos.

AB: Do you remember what you wrote first for the Marvin trilogy? Lyrics or music?

WF: I usually write them together. I start writing one line and then I musicalize that line and then I start writing music down, and then I fill in with dummy lyrics, and my dummy lyrics are pretty good! But I wouldn’t keep them. But they get me where I needed to go. That’s how I kind of wrote it. Now that I teach lyric writing, my students have to write lyrics, they can’t write one line and wait, they have to write the whole lyric, so I have been doing a little more of that, too, because I love working with my students, sometimes just giving them a lyric. You’ve never heard Songs of Innocence and Experience, have you?

AB: Yes, I have.

WF: I provided the lyrics, and my students most of the music. Songs of Innocence and Experience is thrilling! Lisa Howard, she went to Cincinnati [University of Cincinnati College Conservatory of Music].

AB: She did!

WB: And Faith Prince?

AB: She did, too.

WB: Lisa Howard recorded a few of the songs. But we’re discussing Falsettos, right?

AB: Yes! In Trousers.

WF: In Trousers was very interesting because I know exactly how it was written. I was thinking I was a writer. I was calling myself a writer, but I wasn’t writing. And I’d sung with Alison Fraser, Mary Testa, and Kay Passick, and I just called them one day. I said, “Listen, I’m calling

---

1 Songs of Innocence and Experience is a song cycle commissioned in 2005 by Finn’s Alma Mater, Williams College. Finn gave fourteen lyrics that he had written for his students at the New York University Tisch School of the Arts to set to music. Finn himself set five lyrics to music, resulting in a total of 19 songs. The cycle had its first New York City performance on January 14, 2012 at Lincoln Center in a program of Finn’s work, part of Lincoln Center’s American Songbook Series.
myself a writer and let me just come over and sing some songs. I don’t have any songs, but we’ll devise them; I mean, you can inspire me to do something.” And so I started out with a song, “Marvin’s Giddy Seizures,” which is the worst song in In Trousers, it doesn’t do anything. It’s a ballad like [he sings the opening of the song]. That’s the only thing, otherwise it’s hard. And I kept it because it was the first song. And what I found out was that Mary and Alison harmonized naturally. Naturally! Unbelievably. It made it sound so much better. And so I thought, “Well, this is unbelievable!” So I started writing, and I was working, and they were working, and basically they would come over and clean the apartment, and the only thing I could afford to give them was chicken wings. That was the only thing I could afford to serve. At that time, none of us had any money, and they would clean the apartment, I served chicken. As the chicken wings were cooking, I’d write something that we could rehearse. And that’s how that show started.

AB: Where did the name Marvin come from?

WF: I have no idea! I had no idea! No idea! There wasn’t a Miss Goldberg in my life. I have no idea where Miss Goldberg was. I just needed a big part for Mary [Testa].

AB: I saw this online a video of one of her solo performances, and she sings “Set Those Sails.” She tells the audience why Miss Goldberg has to wear sunglasses. She says that when she moved to New York she always wore sunglasses…

WF: She always had! Mary had huge eyes. She had these huge eyes that I just thought, “What am I going to do with them?” So I put her in sunglasses and then had them removed during “The Rape of Miss Goldberg.”

AB: I think it’s so clever!

WF: It’s brilliant!

AB: So the characters came to you as you were writing the songs and talking to the girls?

WF: Yes, but it was totally organic because nothing was written before they were here to clean and eat and sing the songs. It was really fun having them here. “No Bill,” Mary will say, “this is not where it should go!” And Allison would say, “I think that’s where it should go.”

AB: Did you write lyrics, melodies, and harmony down?

WF: I did. I wrote [them] down somehow. I don’t know where they are. I don’t know where any of that stuff is. But it’s written down in my writing, it’s not written down with notes. Actually, I have terrible memory. So I have to write down everything. Chords, everything! Sometimes I’m harmonizing a melody, but mostly I’m writing on top of chord structures.

AB: Do you mean you start with the chord progression first?

WF: Sometimes. Not all the time. Michael Starobin wrote the whole musical down! He transcribed the music listening to me playing the songs and some cassette tapes that I recorded.
AB: Really?

WF: Yes, all the music for In Trousers, March of the Falsettos, and Falsettoland is in Michael Starobin’s hand. You can barely read it. When Michael and I started working on In Trousers, I didn’t know him, and somebody recommended him. So I walked up to his house, he’d just graduated from Bennington, and I said to him, “I need you to transcribe, be the music director, and orchestrate the show.” And he said, “How much you’ll pay me?” And I said, “I can’t pay you more than fifty dollars.” He said, “I will not do it for less than seventy-five.” That was his negotiation. And we are very good friends, ever since.

AB: So you don’t have any draft or sketches as far as the music is concerned?

WF: No. Sorry! What you have to do is call Samuel French and tell them that you want to rent out the material.

AB: Okay, but the licensed version is different from the very first production of In Trousers, isn’t it?

WF: Correct. The In Trousers that they have may not be the In Trousers that’s on the record.

AB: The recording is the 1979 version, right?

WB: Yes, the very first one at Playwright Horizons.

AB: Samuel French will have the one from 1985?

WF: When did Sunday in the Park with George come out?


WF: So it was ’85, yeah, that’s the one they’ll have.

AB: What else can you tell me about the 1979 version, the one that started here in your living room?

WF: That’s the better one. It was a brilliant calling card. It was a brilliant calling card! And everyone wanted to work with me after that. Then I started getting nervous. After March of the Falsettos, I got totally nervous, they thought! And then they didn’t want to work with me anymore. They thought, “He can write what he can write, which may be right.” They may be right. I don’t know. But, In Trousers. In Trousers started in this room. I played the piano, and it was right here, and I borrowed chairs from the temple on 100th street, in West End. And I filled up this whole room with chairs. We’d hand in our handy wipes and apples or something to our audience. Sitting in this room here was Ira Weitzman. And Ira said… do you know Ira Weitzman?
AB: I’ve heard his name, yes!

WF: He was at Playwright Horizons during their glorious years, and he’s been at Lincoln Center since. And he discovered Michael John [LaChiusa] before Michael John was Michael John. When Michael John hadn’t written anything. Believe me, I heard Michael John, and Ira had been genius to know how good Michael John was. And Ira was here, and he said at the end of it: “Would you like to do for composers and lyricists what we’ve done with playwrights? Are you interested?” I said, “Someone else is interested in doing the show,” and it was true. But it turned out that Playwright Horizons was the theater of the ’80s, and I was turning down the best offer I was going to get. And my being affiliated with Playwright Horizons changed my life in so many ways. And the fact that I almost turned it down was one the stupid things I possibly could have done. But luckily the other thing didn’t work out, and I went to Playwright Horizons and was taken care of. We started their musical theater workshop and did four of these In Trousers presentations, and they were wildly successful, unbelievably successful! And Andre [Bishop, artistic director of Playwright Horizons] was here, too, and he said, “I don’t know what it was, but I liked it.” I wish I could show you photos of us in it [Looking around the living room]. I wonder if I can find them. I played Marvin in these performances here in my living room.

AB: Was Chip Zien cast at Playwright Horizons?

WF: He was. I later wrote “Everyone Hates his Parents” [from Falsettoland] for him.

AB: James Lapine had nothing to do with this, right?

WF: No. So, we did In Trousers, and then Lapine was putting…do you know [his play] Table Settings?

AB: Yes.

WF: Table Settings was playing there at the same time, and Andre said, “Go downstairs and watch the show, see if there is anything that you love. And I watched, and I said, “Oh I love the show, but I love the direction.” It was directed like a musical, and I felt it was really beautiful. And he said, “Well, that’s who I want you to work with.” He got us together to write a sequel to In Trousers. I mean, Lapine will tell you that I hounded him and just wouldn’t give up. I don’t remember that, but I’m sure it’s true since I hound all the time, when there’s something I really want. But I don’t know that I ever wouldn’t have been successful without Lapine. The only show that would have been successful was Spelling Bee. We didn’t need him on that. He just made it better! But it was already a great show and a wild success. I don’t know that I ever could have written Elegies if I hadn’t written a bunch of other things with Lapine before. But, certainly, the two Falsettos shows came along. Falsettos was 60% me, 40% Lapine. I’m not a good at structure, and we have to face up to our strengths and weaknesses, and I was lucky that when I had to face up to my structural deficiencies, Lapine was right there to supplement all of it. You know, that was just a lucky coincidence. I get stuck, and when I get stuck, I get stuck. I don’t

---

2 James Lapine directed the Broadway production of The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee. Rachel Sheinkin wrote the book.
write for three days. I get stuck and I start mooning and howling, and Lapine gets you unstuck, he has the most fertile mind of anyone I’ve ever met. And he says, “Well, if that doesn’t work, what about the this, what about this?” It’s all coming from a very clear place. And I’ve lived my life in the mist, really, it’s my asthma! Every day is my asthma for me. Where am I? What am I doing? Where am I going? But Lapine is very clear-headed.

AB: You said that for In Trousers the singers were here with you. What about March of the Falsettos?

WF: March of the Falsettos, almost the whole show was written during the rehearsals.

AB: Oh, really?

WF: Well, Lapine suggested things, and they would change everything. And so I would have to rewrite everything.

AB: So most of the times you had a singer in mind to write a song?

WF: Yes.

AB: Where did the idea of falsettos come from?

WF: Well, I was just walking around and thought a march of falsettos was funny! I didn't know exactly what it was, but I just thought it was funny, and I wrote [he sings in falsetto], “March, march, march of the falsettos. Who is man enough to march the march of the falsettos.” It’s not very good! It’s a real throwaway!

AB: But you kept the idea.

WF: I thought it would be funny! That was the second song I wrote for that show. Originally the title of the show was the first song I wrote, “Four Jews in a Room Bitching.”

AB: Oh, I did not know that!

WF: And the second title was “The Pettiness of Misogyny.” And the third was “March of the Falsettos,” after the song. James said, “I’m not directing a show called “Four Jews in a Room Bitching.” He said he was not. I said, “I don't know why, it’s a really good title!”

AB: So you weren’t thinking about “march of the falsettos” as a way for gay men to try to find their voices…

WF: Oh, yes, that’s what it is! That’s what it became, obviously. But we worked on that during rehearsals.

AB: Did you come up with the idea of adding a psychiatrist to the Marvin musicals?
WF: Yes, the idea of including a psychiatrist was from me, not from Lapine. One of the only things in the story that came from me actually.

AB: Did you have the original cast of Falsettoland in mind when you wrote the music?

WF: Oh, I don’t know! I know that I wrote “Something Bad Is Happening” for Mary Testa. We always offered to her [the role of Charlotte] every time we did it, but she would say no.

AB: The women were all new to the Marvin musicals, Faith Prince, Janet Metz, and Heather McRae. How did this affect your songwriting for Falsettoland?

WF: Well, I’m not sure. Their parts are so small. But they’re important! The thing about Cordelia [originated by Janet Metz] is every line gets a laugh, if they’re good. So, it’s like one of these really small parts that are just fun to play. People don’t hate doing it because it gets a laugh every line.

AB: The word gay never appears in the Marvin musicals, but the word homosexual does appear in Falsettoland. Why did you choose this word instead of gay?

WF: It’s what I was comfortable with.

AB: So you had no other agenda with the term? Homosexual is a word that makes people think of scientific terms or the time when homosexuals used to be treated as diseased people, used in a clinical way.

WF: I’m not sure! I wish there was a real reason for my using of this word. I never thought there was anything different between these words. Obviously, it sounds more clinical.

AB: It’s the very first word we hear in Falsettoland.

WF: Oh, the opening number in Falsettoland. Originally we were going to put Falsettoland with March of the Falsettos and do a two-act show. We were going to put Falsettos together. Before I did Falsettoland, Lapine said, “We’re going to get killed. We have to first do just Falsettoland, and if it’s successful, we can put them together.” And he thought we’d get killed if we just showed the two together, they’d say, “Oh, he just wrote a second act, it’s not a play!” So I had to write an opening number, which is my least favorite number to write, and other things that I was not prepared for. I hate writing opening numbers, I hate, hate, hate writing an opening number. I mean, “Four Jews in a Room Bitching” was the first song I wrote in March of the Falsettos…

AB: Which is a great opening number!

WF: It’s kind of a great opening number, and you know, it sets the tone for the whole show really well. And you think it’s going to be about Jews, that’s what so great about it! And so Jews got offended by it! It’s hilarious who gets offended by my work! So, for Falsettoland, Lapine said, “Write these little verses, different verses, write little things, you know, about the times, about themselves, about gay life, everything about the show.” And so I went, and I handed him
and Michael Starobin twenty little things, one was the opening verse, “Homosexuals, women with children.” The music was all written for each, and I had no idea how to put them together. Lapine said, “Go to the movies, come back in four hours, and let’s see what we’ll have.” And I could not believe when I came back to see them. The opening number was ready as it is today. It’s one of my favorite opening numbers in the world! I mean, all I did was write it, but I didn’t put it together, nor would I’ve known how to put it together. That was all James and Michael.

AB: You didn’t have any order of how these fragments were to be placed in?

WF: I had an idea, but they put it together. I mean, I wrote the whole thing, it’s all mine, but they organized it. And Lapine had the idea of the flashlights pointing to the audience at the word homosexuals, looking for homosexuals in the audience.

AB: Did Lapine help create the other songs, too?

WF: Well, the dramatic situation. I would write songs by myself and bring them to him and the cast. I wrote it, but I did not know the show was going to become a standard. As with March of the Falsettos, I wanted it to be funny. So for the Hebrew that’s in the end of Falsettoland, I started using my half Torah from when I was getting bar-mitzvahed, and it got boring, then I just threw in Jewish words that people would know. It makes no sense, and people said, “It starts being something and then it makes no sense, what happened?” And I said, “I wish I could change it now,” but it’s so goofy. It’s so goofy!

AB: You worked on a completely different musical after March of the Falsettos and before Falsettoland, right?

WF: Romance in Hard Times. But I threw out the score. After working on it for seven years, I threw it out because I was so upset with everything that was going on, the productions, the critics. I was happy to go back to Falsettos.

AB: A musicologist, who has written the most recent Broadway history book, includes you under a trend in Broadway history that he terms “antimusicals”: musical that have no happy ending and, unlike what was going on at the time with The Phantom of the Opera and all those lavish productions, antimusicals focus on issues of gender and race. Falsettos appears as an “antimusical.”

WF: That makes me crazy!

AB: That’s one of the reasons why I want to write about your musicals.

WF: I’m not trying to write antimusicals! I love musicals, that’s a part of the problem.

AB: I think that term “anti” implies that what you do is the opposite of musicals.

WF: Right! I love them but I don't want to write those sorts of musicals. It’s always the push and pull!
AB: How much were you exposed to musicals growing up?

WF: You know, just enough. I was always interested in theater. I used to like to dance around. We’d flood our patio and then we’d put Guys and Dolls on and dance, and skate to Guys and Dolls! We’d dance around the living room to Guys and Dolls and other musicals, Bye Bye Birdie, My Fair Lady.

AB: So you were exposed to classic shows! And you always enjoyed them?

WF: Loved them! Just loved them!

AB: And how was your musical education? How did you learn music?

WF: Oh, I never had music education. I taught myself everything. And I used to play the piano much more than I play it now. And I got pretty good on it, you know. For a banger. I was a very good banger. You couldn’t tell that I didn’t know what I was doing. But now, you know, I’d have to practice, I’d have to practice in order to be in public. And I used to accompany all my shows.

AB: Do you play any other instrument?

WF: No. I can barely play the piano! I used to play guitar, and that’s how I taught myself. I didn’t know any music theory. I just would transfer the notes from the guitar to the piano by ear. I used to play the guitar all the time! And then I played the piano all the time.

AB: Did you start composing on the piano?

WF: Well, yes, I got a book of folk songs and I quickly tired the folk songs, and then I would use the lyrics and just re-harmonize everything. Then I re-harmonized the songs first, and then I’d put new notes in it. The fact is, I’ve worked with a lot of people who are music directors, a lot of people who can take down this stuff, and a lot of people who arrange. I started with Starobin, and then I guess it was Starobin till he gave it up to Ted Sperling. You know Ted Sperling?

AB: Yes.

WF: And then I had Scott Frankel. And then I had Jason Robert Brown. I have a very good nose for talents, you know? And Jason Robert Brown, and then I guess Vadim [Feichtner]. I may be missing someone after him. But Vadim and Carmel Din. And what amazes me is that I’ve had many different people arranged my music and taken down my music, you know, and they don’t take it down exactly the way I’m doing it. But my stuff always sounds like me. I used to feel guilty about the whole thing, now I don’t at all.

AB: Do you think that the fact that other people notate your music appears in the final version of a musical?
WF: Well, a little. It’s much cleaner that anything I would have written. Ted [Sperling] kind of got my style. Michael [Starobin] certainly got it! And Ted always got, too. And Scott Frankel was a music director who just played Falsettos. He didn’t help me, you know, he didn’t work on the show with me, he just played the two when they were together. But I think these are pretty good music directors to have. If you’re just smelling, you’re an excellent smeller! As I told you, the stuff all sounds like me. See, I hate when the arrangements are too overwritten, and I like it to sound like me because that’s what I wanted. And I didn’t want it over-arranged and cleaned up too much. Jason [Robert Brown], when he did A New Brain cleaned it up the most. I love some the arrangements he did for this show, but some of it I think it’s too much, it’s more Jason than me.

Interview with William Finn, June 8, 2015, New York, NY.

AB: I have a few questions about Falsettos first. Then some about A New Brain.

WF: That’s great.

AB: Did you have any parallel in mind when you used the “chop, chop” motif from “This Had Better Come to a Stop” from March of the Falsettos in the racquetball scene in Falsettoland? I think it’s the only music that appears in both musicals.

WF: No idea. I wish I could answer this question. This was so long ago, who knows what was going on in my mind at the time. I just wanted to bring something that I already had. I would love to say that I absolutely had parallels in mind. Let’s just say that I did have parallels in mind. The thing about the racquetball scene is that Lapine staged it before I wrote the music, so I had this theme already and went back to it.

AB: You told me before that Lapine came up with the idea of flashlights in the opening number of Falsettoland. The male characters also use flashlights in the song “March of the Falsettos.”

WF: Yes, but that depends on the production. They did that for the first time when March of the Falsettos became part of Falsettos.

AB: Do you remember how the song “March of the Falsettos” was originally staged in the very first production of March of the Falsettos in 1981?

WF: I don’t remember it very well. They wore white, but I don’t remember details to describe to you. I remember it was weirdly wonderful.

AB: Why at the end of Falsettoland do Marvin and Whizzer sing about being friends and not lovers? Same with Gordon and Roger, they refer to each other as friends in A New Brain.

WF: This was the language I was comfortable with at the time. And still am. No other meaning.
AB: Can you tell me when you composed “I’m Breaking Down”? Was it for the 1985 production of *In Trousers*? How did it end up in *Falsettos*?

WF: I wrote it for the Second Stage Theatre production of *In Trousers*. In California, years later, there was this actress/singer who was a star, and the producers thought she had to appear more in the first half. So, I brought her the song. She wanted me to change the lyrics to “I’m getting down,” but that was idiotic, and I said no. She meant that the character was out of her comfort zone. I don’t even know what that means. It was such a California, idiotic thing to do. I said no.

AB: This production in California was *Falsettos*?

WF: Yes.

AB: Okay, thank you! Let’s move to *A New Brain*. Some lines in the middle of a song, such as the scene when Roger arrives at the hospital, are spoken, and then others are sung. How did you decide what was to be spoken and what was to be sung?

WF: I wish I knew how to answer that! I remember that the actor who originated Roger could not sing very well, and I was compensating for the guy as he was losing his voice. Yes, Roger says “sorry I wasn’t there” and the others sing “Roger has arrived,” but who knows why. It just happened this way.

AB: Do you remember which song from *A New Brain* you wrote first? Is it true that you were thinking initially of a song cycle about surviving a brain surgery?

WF: “I Feel So Much Spring” was the first song I wrote. All the songs were written for the show. I worked on them for five years. It was a very difficult time for me, and I was writing the story of my life. My first night out of the hospital, I knew how to write it, what each verse was going to do. I had been diagnosed with a life-threatening disease. It was difficult! I like to express pain and joy at the same time in my songs, and first night out of the hospital, I finally knew how to write it.

AB: In the program for the original production you mentioned that you wrote eight songs first and then the rest was theater. Do you remember which of the songs of the musical were these eight?

WF: Ah, that’s difficult to remember. “I Feel So Much Spring,” “And They’re Off,” I’d Rather Be Sailing,” “The Music Still Plays On.” These for sure.

AB: So initially you wrote not just songs that Gordon sings, but songs sung by other characters, too?


AB: Was “Change” one of those eight songs?
WF: No, “Change” came later. The music took a long time to get to that opening [he sings the opening vamp]. I worked on it over and over and over; so it came later. Everything related to the homeless lady came later. The one song that was cut was “Anytime,” which is now in Elegies. Do you know Elegies?

AB: Yes!

WF: The song “Anytime” was cut from A New Brain. The actor playing Roger couldn’t sing it.

AB: Do you remember why the song “Trouble in His Brain,” when the doctor explains to the mother that the fluid is blocked, does not have that walking bass that occurs every time the doctors and nurse sing?

WF: I wish I knew the answer for that. I really wish I did! It was a long ago, and I don’t remember exactly how I wrote this song.

AB: How is it different for you to compose music for Falsettos and A New Brain, which have no or almost no spoken dialogue, as opposed to musicals like, say, Spelling Bee, which has a lot of spoken dialogue between the songs?

WF: In the first ones, the verses tend to be longer, much longer because I have to give more information. When there’s dialogue, they supplement the information. That’s how I see the difference. The thing with Spelling Bee was that I had to compose for specific people. The singers were not very good, so I had to write very, very specifically. Till one day I said, fuck it, I’m going to write what these people can sing, and then I wrote “The I Love You Song.” And it was the arranger’s vocal arrangement that made it so beautiful.

AB: Can you tell me some musical theater composers who you believe have some influence on your music?

WF: Do you know Stanley Silverman?

AB: No, I actually don’t.

WF: Silverman worked much with Richard Foreman, who wrote the lyrics. They have two albums that I listened all the time.

AB: What time period was this?

WF: ’60s and early ’70s. Stanley Silverman, I love his stuff. Also Ricky Ian Gordon, Sondheim, of course. I like Stephen Schwartz’s music. I love, love, love Bernstein’s music. And Cy Coleman’s too. I think that Sweet Charity is one of the greatest musicals. I also like Jule Styne’s music; Gypsy is great.

AB: So do you have all these composers in the back of your mind when you compose?
WF: No. These were what I listened to growing up. I remember liking *Porgy and Bess* and Kurt Weill, too. I love Kurt Weill’s music. I used to write all my songs in minor keys because of Weill’s music, but then I decided not to anymore, and now I write minor-key songs only occasionally.

AB: When did you used to write just minor-key songs?

WF: Oh this was when I was younger, songwriting back in college. I figured not to do that anymore, and now I write songs in minor keys just as a treat.

AB: Any opera or composer from the classic tradition that have had any influence on your music?

WF: Ah, not really. My favorite opera is Virgil Thomson’s *Four Saints in Three Acts*. I’m huge fan of what went on [Gertrude] Stein’s brain. I heard about the opera reading her stuff. First time I read it, I thought it was a joke.

Telephone interview with William Finn, October 22, 2015.

AB: The questions I have today all relate to *In Trousers*. My questions have more to do with how some songs ended up in the musical and less with the actual compositional process.

WF: I’ll answer if I can remember. It was a long, long time ago! Go ahead!

AB: The first one is about the only part in *In Trousers* that does not have music, “How America Got Its Name.”

WF: That’s right.

AB: I am curious to know why you decided not to set this to music.

WF: I thought it was a relief, you know, from all the singing. I was the first Marvin, and I was really funny! Anything I said was really funny because I was writing for myself, and I knew what I could make work. And it never was the same, that’s why I like to write things that make people laugh, basically. It was open goofy shit. Then, I had to make changes as other people did it, and it wasn’t nearly as funny. But it was there to make them laugh. People’s ears just got tired of listening to music, music, music.

AB: Especially because it happens towards the end of the musical.

WF: Right!
AB: The other questions are related to one song. The song that Marvin sings, “In Trousers (The Dream).” According to my research, when you did this musical for the first time in 1979 at Playwright Horizons, this song was the last one. Do you remember why you chose it to be the last and not the first one?

WF: Wait! What is the last song now?

AB: Now, if you get the licensed material to stage In Trousers, it’s “Goodnight.”

WF: Goodnight to the ladies?

AB: Yes.

WF: Yeah, I should have done like the original. The original was so much better. This changed wasn’t.

AB: Well, in the published libretto by Samuel French, the song “In Trousers” appears as an alternate, and it says that the author prefers this ending, instead of “Goodnight.”

WF: I obviously do prefer that song at the end.

AB: So, I have the playbill for the 1985 production of In Trousers, at the Promenade Theater. It was directed by Matt Casella.

WF: That’s right.

AB: The last song was “Goodnight.” Why wasn’t it “In Trousers”?

WF: At that time, I was going for a hit. And I thought that this was a sort of big ballad that could succeed outside the show. It’s probably embarrassing if I were to hear it now! But at the time, it seemed, you know, that could be a big hit.

AB: Okay. In this published version, the musical opens and closes with the same song only if you choose the alternative ending.

WF: Right!

AB: The musical was also produced in 1981, or I should say revived and revised, at Second Stage. And based on my research, this song was entirely cut.

WF: Was it? What was the final song in that production?

AB: “Goodnight.”

WF: Really? So it was “Goodnight” in that one, too?
AB: Yes! This was directed by Judith…

WF: Judith Swift, yes!

AB: Do you remember why the song “In Trousers” was cut?

WF: I have no idea! People just told me to cut. I only cut a song if people ask me to. You know, it’s not a theater song, it’s almost like a folk song that has a Philip Glass, Steve Reich piano part, and it’s not really theatrical. It’s for a gay person to sing. Did I ever tell you that when I wrote “Whizzer Going Down,” I was sitting on my bed and I really had to make my mark, I needed a calling card. And I thought, “I don’t know what I’m going to do.” Again, I played it the first time, and it was hilariously funny, this song. But I thought to myself, “So this is the end of your non-existent career. You’re basically saying goodbye to a career by writing this song.” I remember buckets and buckets of lyric sheets, and I saying, “Oh my God, are you out of your mind?”

AB: Going back to “In Trousers (The Dream)” when you wrote it and used in the first production of the musical. Was it your idea that Marvin was dreaming during the song? Was he dreaming about women and men?

WF: Yes, that’s what I thought. He’s dreaming of a world where there were women and then there are no women at all.

AB: Did you have a point in mind when you made this the last song?

WF: I don’t know what to say about that. I guess…what I find interesting about those three shows, and you’re the only person ever who’s written about the three Marvin shows, is that you can count my development as a writer.

AB: Yes, I agree with you.

WF: Going from In Trousers to March of the Falsettos, to Falsettoland, I think there’s great leaps from one to the other. And I wish I had copies of the shows I wrote in college. They were not that long before, you know? I wrote In Trousers when I was, I think, twenty-seven, maybe twenty-six. So I wasn’t out of college that long. I think that the changes from the songs I wrote in college to In Trousers were remarkable. And then the changes from In Trousers to March of the Falsettos, remarkable. And from March of the Falsettos to Falsettoland, you know, I kept pushing myself. I was working very hard, trying to be better.

AB: Yes, I can tell the progress from one show to another.

WF: I remember Lapine saying one day, when we were doing Falsettoland, “We need a song with everyone there, all the characters.” And I’d written a baseball game and not told anyone because I hadn’t finished the piano part for one section. And I said, “Well, I have a song here.” And Lapine said, “Why were you keeping this a secret? When were you going to tell us about this song?” He said, “We can use it and then finish that little section.” It was so crazy that I had
written a whole baseball game thinking that was what we needed and then he asks for it, after I’d written it. That’s when the show kind of started coming together.

AB: And “The Baseball Game” is a great number!

WF: Oh, yes, it is a great number. I really love it!

AB: I love that Falsettoland ends with the piano accompaniment from “In Trousers,” which you described as like Philip Glass’s music.

WF: Falsettoland ends with it?

AB: Yes, the last four measures of the show are [sings the piano riff from “In Trousers”].

WF: Oh, the show. I thought we meant the song.

AB: No, the show Falsettoland ends with that riff. After Mendel repeats the “homosexuals, women with children” from the beginning. When he sings, “Welcome to Falsettoland,” you hear the four last measures of “In Trousers.” I love this cyclical aspect of the three shows.

WF: I didn’t do it too often, so I’m sure someone suggested that I did that, you know? And I just wished it worked. Also, have I told you how the number “Falsettoland” was put together?

AB: Yes, we talked about it in a previous interview. You described how you gave them little bits…

WF: I gave them twenty little sections, and they just put it together.

AB: That’s the opening number, right?

WF: Yes, the opening of Falsettoland. It happened because we were just adding this show to March of the Falsettos. But then Lapine said that we were going to get killed if we did that. We had to do Falsettoland alone first, and I had to write an opening number. But it is a good show, and that was the best I could have given them to work with. And it’s a great opening number. I wrote every word and every note of it, but I had nothing to do with its construction.
Appendix C

Interview with Michael John LaChiusa

Interview with Michael John LaChiusa, June 22, 2015, New York, NY.

Alexandre Bádue (AB): Can you tell me what you can remember about the compositional process of Hello Again? What comes to mind now as far as organizing the songs and the recitatives, if you call them recitatives, how was this process? How long did it take?

Michael John LaChiusa (MJL): The process was interesting. Ira Weitzman asked me if I had read the play. Ira Weitzman is musical theater development person and producer at the Lincoln Center theater, and he was the one who said, “Have you ever read La Ronde?” And I said, “Yes, as a teenager I looked at it.” And he said, “[Director] Graciela Daniele is interested in making it into a ballet, I think it can make a great musical.” And I said, “Ok, I’ll take a look at it and see if there’s anything in there.” And I remember the piece: ten scenes, A meets B, B meets C, C meets D, and I read the first scene and went, “Ok, I remember this play! Fabulous! The whore meets the soldier, soldier meets nurse,” and I wrote the first scene. After I read the play I sat down on the piano and wrote the first scene. I wanted to perfect it a little bit more because I recognize that I wanted to make a strange chordal circle, so I chose a series of four chords that repeat themselves. I think it goes C, F [he sings the intro of the musical], and it ends on some strange B-flat chord. So there’s a series of four chords, and I said, “I’m going to use these four chords in rotation.” It may sound weird. They don’t finish up the traditional melody, so it’s suspended. Because the thing is, it’s a circle, but you never want the thing completed because circles are also infinity. And so I wanted to create a circle effect musically that always sounded like it should have gone to the G7 chord, the V, instead of going to the V, I went to a B-flat chord. This is interesting because it always makes you go, “What?” So that was creating the first song, and the song called “Hello Again,” which I can’t remember how I titled it. I don’t know where I came up with the words “hello again.” I knew we were going to see each other over and over again and “Hello Again” came up as the title. I really don’t know where that came from!

AB: You didn’t have this title when you started?

MJL: No! It just came out lyrically, and I thought, “Ok, great!” I write the lyrics first and then devise music. It took a while to develop the melody down, even though I knew what the harmony wanted to be. I kept playing with the melody over and over and over again until I wanted to have what I had [he sings the music set to the words hello again]. I knew it was going to constantly recur in the piece. It’s also one act, and so therefore complexities of motives, you can go a little bit further with them all. They also have to be extremely interesting and they have to be as new to you as they can be, so you don’t get tired of them all, but they sound interesting every time you hear them. And you can disguise them too! You never know if they’re there or not. And also because each character meets a new character, and this new character meets another new character, the one thing about the play was that each person that you meet in your life, I feel since Schnitzler’s play, you take a little bit of something from them, and they take a
little bit from you, so everybody builds on a piece of music from the other, so that by the end when the senator sings “The Bed Was Not My Own,” it’s actually an amalgam of everybody else’s songs. Each musical phrase derives from a previous song. And you can use this metaphor to see the all-hazard venereal disease, which is what people sort of thought of thought of the musical. I think that there was miscalculation about that, about Schnitzler or even to say the play was about venereal disease. I don’t know if Schnitzler was going for that.

AB: Do you think he was going more for the human connection?

MJL: He was going for the human connection. He’s going for the soul. He talks often a lot about the soul versus the flesh in the piece. I think one of the reasons to writing at the time that I did was AIDS. I think the AIDS crisis had reached a head. We realized that there might be ways to deal with it, but meanwhile we had thousands of deaths. And I didn’t want it to be about AIDS. Audiences could bring whatever they felt about the AIDS crisis, but I was not interested in doing it. I think my show, Hello Again, is probably one of the first musicals where there’s no disease involved with the gay lovers. No one dies of AIDS! I think in musicals about gay lovers, something happens to them. Bill Finn’s Falsettos, obviously. I don’t think there’s many other ones. I think the gays in Hello Again take it at face value. They fuck, and that’s it. They have a good time! Afterwards they don’t have such a good time. But musically it was very interesting, the evolution. Really it was about those four chords that created for me not only a circle of completion, but a circle that can also be infinity. That’s why the last words of the show are we’ll go on and meet again and say hello again. Resolution is not what this play is about. There is no resolution. It can’t! It starts another circle, it’s unending.

AB: I read in one your essays that you do this transition from sung to spoken to full-fledged song back to spoken all in one scene, in one dialogue, on purpose. You wrote that you’re probably going to go to music hell for that.

MJL: Yes, probably!

AB: I don’t think you are!

MJL: I think it’s the writer Mark Steyn who wrote something about the Fred-Ginger effect. In Fred and Ginger movies, they talk, and all of a sudden they go to the verse, then song, then dance. And now one thing about musical theater that I love so much is how, like in the Carousel scene—the bench scene is a great example of art in musical theater—how they’re talking, they go into song, and they come out and they go back in. George Abbot, they greatest Mr. Abbot, loved that! He created that, too, dialogue goes into music and then maybe comes out and goes back in. He was a great proponent of that, a lot his shows have this in it. He said the audience subconsciously feels the musical as a living animal, breathing. There are ways to go in and out of dialogue like that. Well, you don’t have to keep on this kind of curve, like in the bench scene, which is very equal terms. I like playing with that. I like playing that it can be shortly spoken, shortly sung. It causes great anxiety in the audience so that you have a long stretch of music or long, long stretch of dialogue, it tricks the ear, tricks the emotional template, subconsciously, for the audience. You play along with that, it’s really kind of fun to go in and out, in and out because, again, the audience is feeling the musical in a three dimensional form in some way,
shape or form. They feel it as a living thing. There’s a sense of breath, and take a breath and take a breath, you know? Eating and spitting out. All things that animals do. And you can create that effect in musicals. That’s what I love playing around, with that effect…a lot! You have to be choosy about what’s sung, what’s not sung. It might not be clear, but there is definitely a reason why something sounds something. And it’s not always a matter of importance, it’s a matter of emotion. Sometimes if a character lies, I may have them sing in pastiche, then speaking the truth. There are ways to play with what’s true, what’s not true. There are fun ways to do it!

AB: You can change a character’s emotion depending on whether he or she sings something or speaks something

M JL: Yes, exactly right! In that way you can go on that roller coaster. It’s a wonderful thing. The audience has a contract: their ticket is a contract. It is like the thing that they sign, and do you know what’s on that contract? It is, “I’m going to your fucking theater and I am going to fucking suspend my disbelief. I know there’s lighting here, that someone’s elbow is on the side next to me, I know someone’s coughing behind me, there’s this flunky makeup upon the actress’s face, there’s an orchestra playing right in front of me, or not.”

AB: “There’s a conductor right there…

M JL: Waving hands, and people jump into songs.” No orchestra followed you on your way to the restaurant tonight. There’s no orchestra to greet you there with [he sings the theme of “Hello, Dolly”] “Hello, Alex! Hello Alex!” Nothing! The audience’s ticket says, “I believe it. I believe that his is really happening.” And that is a magical thing to happen. They just go with it all.

AB: It’s something you can take advantage of.

M JL: If you don’t, then you’re not doing theater. You’re not making a musical. And if you break the contract, the audience will tell you so. If you’re venturous enough, you’ll go. I don’t know how venturous audiences are today, except that if you say your piece is something they’re going to laugh at, they want to laugh.

AB: Why did you come up with the idea of having other characters singing in the middle of a scene? I’m thinking of the quintet in the scene between the Soldier and the Nurse, when they sing “We Kiss.” Why did you choose this form of presentation, with characters providing extra music, commenting on the action?

M JL: Again, it’s all about psyche and soul; you don’t know who these characters are. Also, I love variety, and why wouldn’t there be a band singing in the other room in five-part harmony in the 1940s? Why would they sing this seemingly innocuous song about angels kissing that’s really about dying and death? Why to bring them in? Or have the opera singer? The opera singer is related to the actress in some way, shape, or form. You have her on the radio, they’re on the Titanic. Then, the Young Thing singing “Going to the Prom,” loving a boy who loves a girl who loves a boy who loves a girl is just this complete sexual gender fuck up. And then you have the Nurse even coming back and singing about angel of mercy as Madonna in the ’80s. And then the Senator trying so hard to be objective about this and his life, and he can’t because he is a broken
soul. You know, you can’t be objective if you have a broken soul. So it’s all these little repeats that happen all the time. And pastiche plays a very important role in the show. Very important role! I feel pastiche gives color, place, and time. I wanted to play around with time and place in the piece. If I stayed in one period, I don’t know, I think it would have been. I could do it, I guess, but it wasn’t of interest to me. I wanted to go deeper into place. I wanted to say it doesn’t matter where you are, when you are, who you are, this thing of us trying to find the lover of our lives in that person that also wants to be gratified sexually, in the same person, is such a freaking struggle over and over. And God bless the man or woman that was lucky enough to find that. That’s the essence of it all! And also to the humanity of it all because we will keep doing it. We will keep looking for that thing that gives us pleasure and that we get our pleasure from, sex.

AB: And the confusion between love and sex.

MJL: Yes! All the time! And the music in the piece sort of confuses that issue too. There is always a question mark at the end of everything. That’s what that fourth chord is at the end of the chord sequence. It’s a question mark. Are you it? Are you the one? Will I keep looking? It’s always a question mark.

AB: So the choice to set each scene in a decade of the twentieth century was something that came to you as you were writing the music?

MJL: It’s random! It was random. It’s random in a lot of respects. I played random with a lot of things to make this work. It was just enough juxtaposition back and forth, but I felt that certain things fed into the other. I knew the Soldier in the first scene is going to go to war, so go to the forties in the next scene. Then I go to the ’60s. The nurse goes to the ’60s with the Vietnam War. Logical! And then after Vietnam, the war is wrapped itself up. Then the Depression Era with romanticism. The 1980s were very ’30s, going to depression with Jimmy Carter. The periods just fed on each other. This period does reflect on this, and the music also reflects it to a certain degree. And I was playing around with what would give the era the jar. Right after the Titanic scene in the 1910s, what do I do? It was the end of a glorious age. Well, we go right to hedonism of the ’70s, cocaine-driven attitudes. So it was back and forth. I loved the variety. I was working with variety.

AB: So the idea of having the different decades and the music to differentiate each went together?

MJL: Yes! And my heart was with scene 8! And it’s true in La Ronde, too. By the time you get to scene 8, the audience has understood the concept: they are going to have sex and feel sad about it afterward. And you need to get to that penultimate scene, scene 9 and then the end. We were doing this in one act, and I couldn’t waste time and get the audience ahead of it. So I had to figure out how get through this scene as fast as possible. I wrote twenty-three songs for scene 8! My two beautiful actors, Malcolm Getts and Michele Paw, learned twenty-three songs. There are still two versions of scene 8 out there. What I wanted to have was a silent movie. I wanted to actually have a silent movie. The silent movie was perfect for the scene, it was going to be a short about the Actress and the Writer. And, of course, they couldn’t afford it at Lincoln Center. Whatever! So we did a version of it ultimately for the final production, but it’s a longer version,
which gave more for the Actress to sing and play, which is fine. Some theaters do that. It gives
the Actress an extra song. She sings “Better Do a Rewrite.” But I still wanted to see the movie
version. This movie comes in, it’s a silent movie, because it’s so different with the subtitles and
the melodramatic music underneath. That was the very last thing that went in, in January 1994.
After the twenty-third song, we said, “Ai Dios Mio, we’re done with this motherfucker. I can’t
do this. The actors want to get out of here. The audience wants to get out of here, they want to
get to the ninth scene. Move forward!” The one scene that never changed from inception was
scene 1. It never changed from the very first day I brought it. I first wrote that scene, I think, at

AB: Did you write much of this music to the cast?

MJL: I did. I began tailoring for everybody. They were remarkable! I had an actress like Judy
Blazer, who was the nurse, who got a vocal instrument that’s just remarkable. And she’s still my
muse. I certainly wrote for Donna [Murphy], to make sure the key was right for her. Carolee
Carmello was remarkable. Malcolm Getts, absolutely! And John Cameron [Mitchell], who could
do all sort of things. Did you know the role of the Young Thing was originally in the reading
play read by Jane Krakowski?

AB: Oh, really?

MJL: Yes, she was the original Young Thing. We were in auditions for the production, getting
ready for the workshop in the summer of 1993. We did some auditions, and Audra McDonald
came in. Audra McDonald auditioned for the workshop! We had one role that was already cast,
and we couldn’t put her in another role. She was just too young. She was just out of Julliard and
too young for one role, unfortunately. But then she got Carousel, you know? [laughs] But John
Cameron comes in, and I was like, “I want him; what role can he play?” He is a Michael John
person, he knows my stuff, he knows me. He knows my music. And then I made the Young
Thing for John Cameron to play. And it all came so easily.

AB: Did you write “Safe” for him?

MJL: I wrote “Safe” for John. I didn’t know John, but I wrote it with John, you know? I know
him, he’s me! It’s my story in a way. Not really me, but it’s my story, what I went through as a
young gay man in New York. I know that! And I wanted him, he was the guy! So that music was
all for John. It was instantaneous. That was an instantaneous song.

AB: What about the duet that he sings with Malcolm Getts, “The One I Love?”

MJL: I don’t remember very much about it. I think it came later, too. Actually, I was going to cut
the song. It was the first time that I was asked to politely leave a rehearsal room. We were doing
the workshop, Tom Hulce at the time was playing the Writer, wonderful actor, great producer
now. And John Cameron and he were playing the Writer and the Young Thing, and I’d had some
troubles with the scene because I thought when they sing this song, “The One I Love,” it was
sappy. I hated it! Corny melody! It’s terrible. I hate that song. It brings everything down, it’s so
sentimental. It was just killing that scene there. And the boys were trying to find a way to
navigate into that scene, because it’s very abstract. It’s a very abstract theme. We don’t know whose words are true. At that point in *Hello Again* everything begins to get more and more abstract. After the wife’s scene, with the song “Tom,” everything becomes to get more abstract. By scene ten we don’t even see the sex anymore. Scene one is all about sex, it’s fuck. And every scene after gets more and more and more abstract. And that’s one of the things I wanted to play with the music. The music gets too, and I was bothered by “The One I Love.” I remember walking in and saying, “Oh my God, that song has to go so the scene can still be really edgy and sad.” I walked into rehearsal, these boys were working hard on making that work. Graciela Daniele, the director, was making them work so hard on that song. And I remember walking in and saying, “I know what’s wrong with this scene: that dumb song!” It was just dead silence in the room, and Graci said, “Leave us to work.” And it was the only time I was asked to leave a rehearsal. I learned a lesson from it all: take your time, let actors and director solve the problem with what you give them. Not a problem, but challenges. Trust in the challenge, and just because actors and director may not have got it the first time around, or may not understand the first time around, they’re good, like these actors were, and the director is someone you love and trust. They will solve the challenge that you give them. It didn’t make sense to me to have that song in the show, but I would never move it from the show now. It’s a little too tuneful for my taste, but it was very beautiful and people loved it.

AB: I love it!

MJL: And it is a beautiful duet between two men! It’s gorgeous, which, again, I never heard in the theater: two men singing a love song to each other.

AB: And it’s a duet that happens after they have sex.

MJL: Right! And it’s false! It’s the Writer writing his fantasy love song. It was so hard for the actors to wrap in it, but of course if we didn’t have a genius like John Cameron Mitchell and Tom Hulce, later Malcolm Getts, who wrapped their heads around it, it wouldn’t have worked. And it becomes the most beautiful thing that you’ve seen in your life, and Graciela Daniele encouraged that to happen. So I learned a very important lesson about my music, lyrics, and some trusting: let those people solve the problem.

AB: Was it Graciela who came up with the idea of the Wife, when she looks in the mirror, seeing the Whore in the reflection?

MJL: Oh, Graci! Yes, that was Graciela. Andre Bishop and Ira Weitzman, on paper, didn’t get it. They didn’t understand it. Graci and I talked to them! I was just going to have her [the Wife] doing a reflection in the mirror. Graci said, “What if the Whore comes through?” And of course the Whore comes through! Immediately, I was, “Is she smarter than I?” But she’d read my script about the Whore, the whole scene I’d written about a Whore, and Marianne, and a lot of things from that scene. And Graci said, “Of course her [the Wife’s] psyche is a whore. Who she is is the soul of the whore.” Such magnitude! And she said, “The Whore comes through and they [the Wife and the Whore] dance.” Also, it seems about self-masturbation. The fantasy leads to a masturbatory one. She can’t get off on her husband, so in her mind she goes and fantasizes about this stranger, Tom, and although she’s never slept with this stranger, she fantasizes about having
him. Then the whore becomes Tom, but it’s really her, since it’s a reflection, so what’s a better expression for masturbation? Masturbate looking yourself in the mirror, which is the whore! It’s layer upon layer upon layer, but the producers didn’t understand it on paper. And Ira didn’t understand it on paper until they saw it, because, guess what? It’s a ballet! And until you have the ballet in motion and you can see the ballet, no one else would be into it. Dance is the hardest thing to put on a stage, and to convince people. It’s in the program’s first page, this is a ballet with words.

AB: I love the song “Tom”!

MJL: It’s meant to be there! It’s the fullest moment of the show, when you reach number 5 of 10, and it’s the moment we start breaking all the reality of things. We had a little taste of it with the quartet coming out in scene 2. Also, the men commenting on the College Boy’s impotence in scene 4. Then the Whore comes as a reflection of the Wife. We watch the Young Wife leave her body to have sex, that’s where the abstraction starts. And musically, it becomes more and more abstract too. And the song “Tom” is a combination of two songs: the bridge of “Tom” is “We Kiss,” which we heard in scene 2, sung by that quartet. Remember that everything starts to get all mashed together.
Appendix D

Interview with Andrew Lippa

Interview with Andrew Lippa, June 20, 2015, New York, NY.

Alexandre Bádue (AB): When did you start composing the music for *The Wild Party*, and how was the process for you to complete that score?

Andrew Lippa (AL): I started writing *The Wild Party* in January of 1996, and the production went into rehearsal in January of 2000. So that was a four-year process, getting from the first notes of the show and the first time it was on stage. And that is actually as brief a process as I’ve ever heard for a show to go through. It went very quickly. The specific answer to the question how did it take me to write the show, it’s not like a commission for the New York Philharmonic, where you sit down and write the piece, and you can explain how you’ve done it. I wrote a first draft of the first act by July of that year, 1996. By 1997 there was a full draft of the entire show, when we did another developmental step, in the summer of ’97. But while we were there in this two-week process in 1997 at the Eugene O’Neill Theater Center in Connecticut, I wrote five songs, throughout other things. So, musicals go through constant development and reinvention, and even to the point where we’re a doing a production of *The Wild Party* this summer in New York City, and I have thrown out four songs and restructured quite a bit of the first thirty minutes, written new lyrics for a good number of things, cut another quite small things, and wrote a new song at the end of the show. So, they keep changing and going.

AB: I actually have my ticket to go see that in July.

AL: Oh, great! Then being familiar with the show and the score as recorded in 2000, you’ll see what’s different. You’ll see if we’ll be successful or not!

AB: How did the idea of the protagonists presenting themselves in the third person and singing the action come to you? Was it something that you thought of when you read the poem or as you were writing the songs?

AL: That idea is presented in the poem over and over again. The poem does it quite a bit. Well, it doesn’t do it quite a bit with the character speaking about themselves in the third person. I can’t remember. I haven’t read the poem in a long time. But I guess, yeah, now that I’m thinking about it. [laughs] I didn’t know it was in the poem! It might have been my invention. The interesting thing about that particular notion of the characters speaking of themselves in the third person is one of the substantial changes for this show this summer. I removed all of that from the show. Characters are never self-referential in the third person anymore. I took that out. One of the reasons why I took it out, part of it, it’s just because of fifteen years of experience, life changing, and my life changing, and seeing the piece in a different way. And part it is, I guess, an extension of that, there is more humanity in the piece if they don’t do that. If they sing about themselves, it’s cold and distancing. That was one of things that we were interested in fifteen years ago,
writing something that was a little bit cool and distancing, and a Brechtian idea that was lurking somewhere in the original version of *The Wild Party*. And I’ve taken that out.

**AB:** What about the chorus?

**AL:** The chorus is still there. The substantial exception to that is what is called “The Apartment” scene. It’s the one that’s not recorded. But the other characters are referring what’s going on as they watch it or they act as the Greek chorus to the leading characters, and they say things that the leading characters also say. But still, there’s nobody speaking in the third person about themselves. For the most part. There may be a few exceptions, but for the most part, I got rid of it.

**AB:** This changes the presentation of the action. It’s a very interesting choice!

**AL:** The whole motion of getting the opportunity of doing the show again particularly in New York City, particularly with this extraordinary cast and production team...you don’t get that opportunity. You get that opportunity once, when an opportunity comes along to rethink and redo something. I did this with *John and Jen* earlier this year, my first musical, which was revived this winter. I looked at the piece and said, “How can I make this better?” And it’s really a simple notion, a simple question, and creators have done that throughout history. There are many examples in literature and music where people have gone back and revised their work. Beethoven’s rewriting of *Fidelio* is a great example. There are multiple versions of *Fidelio*. He kept revising it and improving it to his liking. That’s the great thing: I created it, I own it, I can change it. And it’s something actually that I have to remind myself of. I have to be reminded. One of the things that reminded me of that was when I saw *Into the Woods*. At the beginning of this year I saw *Into the Woods*, the film, and I wrote to Stephen Sondheim. I told him how wonderful it was, but I also thanked him saying, “You know, I know you didn’t do it for this reason, but you changed a lot of lyrics in *Into the Woods*, and from my perspective, I think it’s perfect, and yet you changed it, you made it different in the movie. And it is equally perfect, just different, and it reminded me that I can do that too. I can go back to my work and change it.” If Stephen Sondheim is going to change *Into the Woods*, I can change *The Wild Party*. And he wrote me back and said he was glad I liked it and wished me well with the rewrites for *The Wild Party*. He was so kind and generous to me.

**AB:** One of the aspects of your composition for *The Wild Party* that I like is that you have full-fledged, complete songs, but then you also have these passages that are sung, then spoken, then you think it’s a song, but it’s not a complete song. Can you talk about how you decided what was going to be spoken and what was going to be sung?

**AL:** I probably can’t. So much of these things are just instinctual, and you just go. You go on based on what feels right as you’re doing it. I wasn’t then, but I’m interested now in non-traditional forms of storytelling or at least non-linear forms of storytelling. I love stories that are told out of order. I love stories out of chronological order. I’m interested in seeing what the theater can do, and I mean specifically the commercial musical theater. Can you reach a large audience and still tell a story out of order? I’m very fond of the movie *21 Grams*, which is directed by Alejandro González Iñárritu. That movie goes constantly out of order and yet you
somehow know what’s going on. You can follow what’s going on. It doesn’t need to go in chronological order. I’m not a fan of abstraction, so I’m not interested in making an abstract musical or a musical with no opportunity to connect to a character or story. I think we’ll always tell stories in chronological order, but I think there are other ways to tell stories, and I’m interested in that. And one thing that I want to elaborate on one touch is that the book to a musical doesn’t mean the spoken bits. The book to the musical is the overall structure, the creation of the story at every point in the story, and the creation of the characters, how they interact, and with whom they interact. It is the entirety. A person who writes the book but doesn’t write the songs is still very involved in writing where the songs will go and what the songs will be about. The most extreme examples of that is Sweeney Todd, where’s there’s very little spoken dialogue and yet Hugh Wheeler, and I don’t know this for a fact because he has never spoken about it, but I am certain that Hugh Wheeler wrote a book to that musical. He might have written something in prose, he might have written an outline and given it to Stephen Sondheim. They might have discussed for moths on it, which is most probably true because that’s how most musicals are made, a lot of chatting. But the book to Sweeney Todd is an extraordinary accomplishment, and yet nobody really talks. And this decision about when things happen and how things happen, who sings then, who’s involved with the scene, the book writer will come up with, “Oh, what if it were blah, blah, blah?” But the book writer, the hand of the book writer, is all over something like Sweeney Todd. So the notion of The Wild Party, despite that there’s very little speaking, the book writing is the structural element, the notion of who does what, when, and how the story gets told. It’s an extraordinarily important function if anything because it’s the person who creates the architecture of the evening.

AB: How was it for you to do all of them: music, book, and lyrics?

AL: It was a full undertaking. And I say that with a sense of laughter. I was very young, I didn’t know what I didn’t know, and that’s often a great thing, when you’re young, and I’m trying to recapture that as I’m getting old. But it was borne out of necessity, I didn’t know anybody and didn’t have anybody to collaborate with. I had never written lyrics before, but I remember thinking and being passionate about wanting to tell this story in a musical and realizing that if I didn’t sit down and do it, it’s not going to get done. There’s nobody out there in the world waiting for Andrew Lippa to write this musical. In fact, I doubt there are many people still waiting for Andrew Lippa to write a musical. In fact, I doubt there are many people still waiting for Andrew to write a musical. It’s a personal passionate thing. I write musicals because I want to, and it’s important to me. And so, with The Wild Party, it was important to me, and I had an idea of how to do it and thought, “Well, I can do it by myself.” And that turned out to be an exhausting experience, but one that I’m very glad I did. In fact, I thought afterwards that I would never do that again, and that’s just not true. I’m doing it right now. I’m working on a piece right now that I’m writing all by myself. I’m writing the whole thing, the music, the lyrics, the story. I kind of lied to myself, and I’m actually doing it again.

AB: Why did you choose to use different musical styles in The Wild Party? You use a lot of the 1920s jazz, but other songs go towards other styles, like pop, rock, and even Latin music. Why did you choose that approach?

AL: For me The Wild Party is a story that is set in the 1920s but is not necessarily of the ’20s. I’ve heard criticism before. People have said, “Who played the guitar in the 1920s? It’s not
authentic. It’s not the period.” My answer is, it is curious, it is a piece set in a period, it is not a period piece. And I think that this is a very clear explanation. The people who understood what I was going for understood that it’s 1999 as it was 1929. The notion of these little-level celebrities, this little show folk trying to be bigger than they are, their behaviors and addictions to drug and alcohol and sex that permeated their little world was one that permeates our little world. And so musically, it opened for me the door to lots of styles, you could be pan-stylistic, if there is such a term, and still feel like the same show. And I think musically I accomplished that.

AB: Music adds this extra layer. It’s like in Spring Awakening. They didn’t have rock music in the late nineteenth century, but when they break into rock songs, you see the connection.

AL: Yes!

AB: Did you have the actors/singers who were in the original production in mind when you wrote the music?

AL: Julia [Murney] developed the show with us the longest. By the time we got to the Eugene O’Neil Theater Center in 1997, Julia was playing Queenie. And so anything I wrote additional for Queenie following that, Julia was in my head. Much in the same way, Kristin Chenoweth, who played the character of Mae during that particular workshop. I wrote “Two of a Kind” for Kristin. I will have an actor in mind when they’re playing the role, but I don’t specifically write for those actors. Brian [D’Arcy James] came along later in the process, as did Idina [Menzel] and Taye [Diggs]. And so almost all of the material was already written, so they were examples of actors coming and being right for the show, I suppose, as opposed to the show being written for those fantastic particular talents.

AB: I have some questions regarding specific songs. Was the song “The Gal for Me” in the show when it opened in 2000?

AL: Yes, “The Gal for Me” existed, it’s in the show, and it’s part of the score. It was just something that we did not record. There are several reasons why we didn’t record some things. Some of it has to do with the amount. I can’t remember…it’s one of two things, it’s the amount of information you can actually encode on a CD, how many minutes of music, and in the old days I think it was seventy-two minutes, now it’s closer to eighty. There’s also musicians’ union rules that govern the number, it’s so complicated, rules that govern the minutes of music that you can put on your CD based on what you’re paying. And I think some it had to do with that. We didn’t have the money to go over a certain number of minutes. So some things did not get included. So, “The Gal for Me” is definitely in the show, much like “Listen to Me,” which is a huge quartet for the four leading characters in Act II that did not get recorded, nor did “The Apartment,” which is a substantial sequence, but that did not get included on the recording either.

AB: But “The Gal for Me” has always been in the show.
AL: “The Gal for Me” was a late addition. The last thing that went into the show. I wrote it after a certain preview at the Manhattan Theater Club. And we put it into the show for performances later. So it was put into the show in the first week of previews.

AB: And what about a song called “Mary Jane”?

AL: “Mary Jane!” You know what? I was looking for “Mary Jane,” and I don’t know where it is! If anybody out there finds the sheet music, send me a copy! Or if you find it! “Mary Jane” was written for the character of Dolores. We did a workshop in mid-1999, and it was in the first act. There’s “Old-Fashioned Love Story,” there’s “Wild Party,” and there’s “Two of a Kind.” They were led by quote unquote “the other characters in the play,” not the four leads. And the second act, I wanted to have two other things for other characters. One of them was “Jackie’s Last Dance,” and one of them was this thing called “Mary Jane” for the character of Dolores. Alanis Morissette went on to write a very good song called “Mary Jane,” but I think I wrote that before Alanis did. Dolores was a cross-dressing man, so a man dressed as a woman, and it was a moment when he had been sort of humiliated and took off his wig, and sat in a pool of booze, and he was sitting alone and sang about this sad girl he knows. It was a very strange sad song. The guy we casted in the show sang it in falsetto. He had a really high voice. It was a very odd moment. I just didn’t quite work.

AB: What about a song titled “Just One Day”? Was it going to be the finale of the show?

AL: “Just One Day” was one example of the end of the show. It replaced “How Did We Come to This?” for a couple of performances. It just wasn’t right. It somehow just didn’t add anything, and we put “How Did We Come to This?” back in.

AB: Is it true that “How Did We Come to This?” was written initially for Mae to sing?

AL: It was, back in Act I. No, sorry, in the middle of Act II! After “The Fight.”

AB: After “The Fight,” yes, that’s what I found out. I wanted to make sure this information was correct.

AL: Yes, that is correct. And there’s a bizarre verse. I think you can find it on YouTube. There’s a recording of Kristin [Chenoweth] doing a demo recording of this very odd verse that precedes the main part of the song. And that verse got cut, but then I wrote a new version of the accompaniment and moved that song to Queenie.

AB: Oh, interesting!

AL: And now, this song is cut for the production this summer [for New York City Encores! Summer Series].

AB: Which one?
AL: “How Did We Come to This?” I wrote a new song for the end of the play called “Happy Ending.”

AB: Oh, I’m looking forward to hearing it.

AL: Yeah, so, this is not there.

AB: When you were composing the music for this musical was there any piece of musical theater that you had in mind? You talked about Sweeney Todd, but was there another piece of musical theater that had similar structure that may have served as a model? A musical that you were looking into and following the structure?

AL: Yes, it goes by the name of Dreamgirls.

AB: Oh, wonderful!

AL: If Dreamgirls hadn’t existed, The Wild Party would not exist. I wanted The Wild Party to move strictly when it came down to what it looked like, how it moved, how it was always dancing, I wanted The Wild Party to be like Dreamgirls in that respect.

AB: Did you ever music direct it or play in a production of it?

AL: No. I saw the original Broadway production before it opened. I saw one of the early previews, when I was still in high school, and I was visiting New York. And I saw it, and it took my breath away! It was a very formative experience, and I’ve never been involved in the production of Dreamgirls, but I’ve seen it one or two times since. I saw it in New York, and since I saw the original production, I saw the movie. [Composer] Henry Kregor is a friendly colleague, someone I know. But otherwise, no, I had no involvement with the production of that show.

AB: Who are other musical theater composers who you would consider an influence?

AL: Leonard Bernstein, Sondheim… the usual ones… Kander and Ebb, Stephen Schwartz has been a great mentor. In one sense, the answer is all of them because I learn something every time I approach any of those shows that came before me. And in some cases, I got to know all, in fact almost all of them, with some exceptions. I met all of them in some way or other. I don’t think I knew them all, I can’t say I knew them all, but I’ve met almost all of the guys who in the past twenty years were still alive who were influences in one way or another. Some of them I’ve become close to, and others I just know when say hello to at parties. But it’s an extraordinary thing this collection of people, primarily men. I knew Betty Comden. I did a show with Comden and Green many years ago, and I did interview Cy Coleman for a magazine article the day before he died. I knew Marvin Hamlisch. I’m friends with Steven Schwartz, and I’m friends even with Sondheim. I worked with Charles Strouse on a show so many years ago. Sheldon Harnick has been a mentor to me since I was in college. But I’ve met, like I said, and got to know most of those mentors. Bernstein died on my first year in New York, so I didn’t meet him. And I never met Jule Styne. He was one I wish I had met. I know Maury Yeston. There’s such a tradition of
each generation giving what they know to the next one. In that way, it’s like an old-fashioned gild, where if you were a silversmith, you’d teach the next generation how to be a silversmith. So many men and women who have written musicals before me are engaged in helping the next generation of writers. Now, at 50, I’m going off tomorrow to teach a songwriting workshop that I teach every summer at Northwestern University. I meet with a group of writers in their twenties, and now I’m becoming one of those people! I guess that’s how it’s supposed to work, and I’m very grateful for it!

AB: That’s how a tradition is built, right?

AL: That’s correct! That’s correct! And in part, that’s because I’ve been fortunate enough. When I was in my twenties, and Stephen Sondheim came to one of our readings of *Jon and Jen* and he and I spoke on the phone, he gave me his thoughts, notes about the show, and what he liked and thought we might improve. Learning how to give that kind of feedback, it’s important learning how to listen to this kind of feedback. And that’s what we all do for each other. Every big show I’ve ever had, I’ve had writing colleagues to come and give me their thoughts, give me their help along the way. They did the same with me, asked me to come see their show out of town. We do it for each other because it’s a very big collaborative art form. And experiential. You need to listen to the experience that someone has watching it, and you might pick up a couple of things that will help make it better.

AB: It’s a community, and one helps the other.

AL: It is indeed a community, and I’m sure there are communities in other artistic endeavors that do the same kind of thing. I love the writing community. The theatrical writing community, I feel, is a very close group, and we all recognize this is the heart of what we do: to help the next generation. So people get better.

AB: What about your musical influences and musical taste outside musical theater?

AL: Well, they’re pretty varied. I just downloaded all of the Glazunov symphonies, and I don’t know Glazunov at all, and I told a music friend of mine who then sent me two more CDs of Glazunov, so I’ve got a summer of Glazunov to get through! There’s a certain amount of contemporary music that I go after. I love Pink for example and her new folk record [*Rose Ave.*] that she did with. I can’t remember the guy’s name in the duo You+Me! [Dallas Green]. I just find her interesting. Nate Ruess’s new album is really awesome! I love it! I don’t really listen to hip-hop, I think I kind of missed it at the time when I was young enough to have started to understand what it was. I’ve heard and liked it, but it’s like football, if you don’t have somebody to teach how it works, you don’t necessarily know what it is.

AB: True!

AL: I don’t listen to tons of that although I love the wordplay, the words, I love that. I just got James Horner, the film composer. He just wrote a piece for violin and cello and orchestra, I’ve been listening to that. James Horner, of course, the well-known film composer. There’s all this
Glazunov. There is this terrific song duo called Barnaby Bright, really interesting, beautiful stuff! So as you can see, lots of different things.

AB: Was opera ever any influence or something that you enjoyed?

AL: Yes, in high school I discovered opera and purchased a bunch and listened to a lot. I find going to the opera less interesting because I find that most of the time the productions just not…I don’t know…they don’t feel relevant, except that the music is gorgeous. But the storytelling is often lame or the productions feel tired in a way. I like modern, contemporary operas. I’m a John Adams fan, Jake Heggie is a friend of mine. I like to seek out new operas or operas that are not in the large houses. And I like the whole universe of mashup stuff, you know, like Dave Malloy has been doing that. He took a Rachmaninoff thing at Lincoln Center called Preludes, and he did Rachmaninoff and his own writing, and mixes it all together and there’s something really awesome about that. That’s another reason I’ve been listening to Rachmaninoff is that I might be doing a piece that uses Rachmaninoff as a jumping off point, but also then the original.
Appendix E
Interview with Jeffrey Lunden

Interview with Jeffrey Lunden on June 12, 2015 in New York, NY.

Alexandre Bádieu (AB): I have never seen a production of Wings, but from reading the libretto, the idea that I have is that there are two parts: in one, at the beginning, we’re inside her head after the stroke, and then in the second half, we see her recovery.

Jeffrey Lunden (JL): Yeah, we used to joke that when she has the stroke, she’s in an opera, and when she gets better she is in a musical. Arthur [Pearlman] and I were talking about this just about a month ago because we had a new reading of a new show in Chicago, and we were talking that there is a moment in Wings towards the end of what I would refer to as the first act, right before “Out on the Wing,” where Emily starts singing and Amy can hear her singing. It’s, you know [he sings], “some days–no–some days–better,” and that’s literally the first time that somebody sings to somebody else without it being the “making you name powers” and all that stuff. It’s just meant to be kind of pinging in her head what she’s kind of hearing and not hearing. But this is the first time where she actually sings something and somebody else understands what she was saying, and we were really, really nervous because we thought, wow, you know, we’ve established this set of rules and now we’re changing, and is there going to be a big hiccup, is the audience going not accept it? And it was never a problem. And we were kind of like, “oh, ok, that’s good, you know.” But yeah, you know, the idea always was not that she’s in an opera and goes to a musical, but initially we wanted to do sort of reverse engineering, or I wanted to do it, as a composer: place the full-fledged music at the back end of it and then fragmented for the beginning. So that the idea was that these fragments eventually started to cohere and become fully-fledged musical ideas. It never worked that way, but that was the idea. But we wrote that little kind of Lucky Lindy 1920s number that you hear at the very beginning that she puts on, and you probably noticed that, or maybe you haven’t noticed, that the first notes are [he sings the first three notes of the song]. You hear it all through the first thirty, forty minutes of the show, but it’s also literally the last music you hear when she’s died, you know [he sings the last three descending notes of the score]. And what we did when I wrote that ’20s music was that I made all of the interstitial stuff, all of the fills, the themes from the show.

AB: So the song came after the themes of the show?

JF: Yeah, it kind of came after. Yes, instead of coming first, it came after. And I’ll tell you why it came afterwards. But the idea is, you know, that she has the stroke as she’s listening to the song and sort of all of the music grows up the same time, and so all of those little fills and stuff in that music are actually what is the core composition, that’s the music. But the reason we ended up getting there, it was very interesting, and I can tell you sort of a little bit of the process Arthur and I had been writing together since we were in junior high school together. And when we were both in college, we were on a break, I think it was a Winter Break, and the play Wings was playing at the Kennedy Center. We both grew up outside Washington, DC, and we went to the Kennedy Center to a matinee, and I think that Arthur Kopit actually was doing a panel
discussion. I think that he might have been doing a panel discussion before we saw the show, whatever. But anyway, we saw the play and were both blown away by the play, and neither of us had even the slightest thought that this might be something that could be adapted musically. So, fast forward years later, I went to Oberlin, and he went to Brown, we were seniors, we wrote a piece together. And we ended up in the NYU musical theater program. First MFA class there. And we’re studying with people like Sondheim and Prince, and Condem and Green, and Jule Styne, and Arthur Lawrence. Lawrence, he was actually very, very influential with us. And we got a job, a job that we were never really paid for, working with Marni Nixon who had been the voice of Natalie Wood in West Side Story, Deborah Carr in The King and I, and…what was her other big one?

AB: My Fair Lady?

JF: My Fair Lady, right. And so we were doing this one-woman cabaret/theater piece. It was kind of frustrating, and eventually we ended up off the project because we lost the director and they brought in another director, and we just left the project. But Arthur, in the meantime, had kind of gone back and reread Wings. And he said, “Alright, I have a crazy idea for you. What if we adapted Wings?” And I said, “That really is a crazy idea. That just doesn’t seem like something that wants to sing at all.” But he had written some stuff and he handed me a lyric and it was a song called “How Long Have I been Here and Wrapped in the Dark?” He had gone through the script and he thought, “Oh well, I’ll write a lyric.” And we like when we work on new shows to do sort of a test run to kind of see if there’s music in there. And so we started working on this thing, and it became really clear to us really quickly that yes, Wings can be sung and that no, this was not the way that it should be sung because there was a very coherent lyric for a part in the play that really is incoherent, and it was sort of there that we kind of talked about the idea of fragmenting and then the fragments cohere. And we got excited by it because for better or for worse, and I think for better, we’re kids of Sondheim, right? Kids? We were kids! Writers of the Sondheim generation. And I mean literally when we were kids, when we were in junior high school and college is when Sondheim and Prince were doing their kind of great shows in the ’70s. And, as a matter of fact, we both went to the opening night of Pacific Overtures at Kennedy Center in Washington, DC. So, you know, that was kind of our opportunity. And I went to the closing matinee because I was curious to see how things had changed and they had really changed. So, the big dictum of Sondheim is that content dictates form. And obviously those shows, each one of those shows were all driven by the content. The form is driven by the content. Pacific Overtures, oh my god, you know! And so I think we got very excited about Wings because we realized that we could really kind of experiment with what a musical is. And truth be told, we never wrote anything before like it and we’ve never written anything since like it because we’ve written different shows that are based on different materials, or original, or whatever. But, this one we really thought that we could formally play with. So, we thought we were going to write the end of it and then go back, and what happened was once we determined this was something we wanted to try, we went ahead and started working on it. And Arthur actually kind of wrote a libretto. I mean, it was something that I kept changing, but fundamentally, yeah, he wrote a libretto.

AB: From beginning to end, he had pretty much everything there?
JF: Pretty much! But there were changes. It was pretty much a first draft. But I would say that a lot of the beginning of the show is pretty much just sort of set in a way an opera composer would set a libretto. And we didn’t have the rights to do the show. And we kept on trying to get in touch with Arthur Kopit, and he kept on avoiding us. For a year or two we tried to get in touch with him. And finally, it was no way near finished, I think that the first piece that we did, the first piece of music that we completely finished was “Snow.” But then we had about then minutes from the beginning of the show. And I got to track down, the old-fashioned way, I tracked down his phone number in Connecticut. I called, I got his wife, which turned out to be the best thing ever. And I said we just wanted to meet with him, and if he says no, he says no, but we just wanted him to hear what we were doing. And why don’t we meet at the Dramatist Guild and just play him stuff. He agreed to do that. And I brought in my synthesizer, and I even actually had some sequences that I had put on the synthesizer along with the beautiful grand piano they had there. And we played like maybe fifteen minutes.

AB: Of “Snow?”

JF: Well, we played the beginning part and then we played “Snow,” so that he could sort of see where it was going. And when it was over, he said, “You know, I was coming fully expecting to say absolutely not.” He said, “Why two guys want to musically adapt a play that’s about language. It’s about aphasia. But now I understand what you’re going for. You’re going for the emotion underneath that.” And he said: “I feel like at very least, it’s going to be an interesting show. So go ahead with my blessing.” And he said, “As you adapt it, I would encourage to make it your own and one of the most interesting things about people who have strokes and have aphasia is that sometimes they literally can sing.” He said there are actually aphasia choruses, people who cannot speak, but can sing. So we should just look into that.

AB: Was there a song in the play that the main character thinks of, like “The New Daredevils of the Air”?

JF: No, not at the point. Not at that point.

AB: I mean in Kopit’s play, in the original?

JF: No. There is an equivalent moment, and I would have to go back and look at it. But there’s an equivalent moment. There’s a quasi-breakthrough moment with Amy, who is purely a speech pathologist, but no song. So anyway, one of my best friends was a music therapist. Although she wasn’t working with that population, she knew a woman who was the head of the New York State Music Therapist Association at the Beth Abraham Hospital in the Bronx with Oliver Sacks and other neurologists, and she arranged for us to come in. And it was fascinating because, first of all, it was the first time that it had gone from kind of the theoretical, just reading Kopit’s play and his long preface to the play about his father and all of that, to actually seeing people who were aphasic and some of them were like fluent aphasic. There was actually a guy who was Italian who was saying kind of “yes to mama,” “sure to mama,” “mama,” kind of speaking, but it was all gibberish Italian. And Cony, she sat on this little chair without a back on casters and she had a piccolo accordion, and she went to various people, and some of them were practically inert. And she went to these various people and she would sing songs that, for lack of a better
word, came from their background, you know? So it was stuff like “When Irish Eyes Are Smiling,” or “Let Me Call You Sweetheart,” or “Hava Nagila.” All of a sudden you’d see somebody who could barely move who would start dancing to the music, or swaying to the music, or singing to the music even if they were a non-fluent aphasic and couldn’t get out a lot of words. So it was a fascinating, incredibly eye-opening afternoon. Then we interviewed her. We had a long conversation with her, and she talked about how she thought of the brain as three-dimensional and that memory’s pathway in the brain is three-dimensional, and that if one pathway was blocked, she could find another pathway to use to unblock it. So she literally was having people sing “Hello, how are you” [he sings], “hello, how are you?” because they could get the words without thinking about it. We came back and met with the speech pathologist, the language specialist there who showed us all kinds of videos of people with aphasia and different kinds of aphasia. But it was seeing her in that piccolo accordion that made us think, “Well, let’s make her a music therapist and let’s play with that,” and I think that at that point Art had the idea, it was probably Art, that “Why don’t we write some Lucky Lindy song, and when the stroke happens the song kind of blows to bits, and then that moment when she kind of gets her memory back, she’s listening to the recording. And it really was quite liberating thing for us as writers to realize we could do that. And that finally changed the show and made it more of a musical.

AB: You were coming from the song now to write the rest of the show.

JL: Right! I remember it was hilarious we found the band that plays at the Cubs games outside of Wrigley Field. We asked them if they’d come in, and there was some musical on tour in Chicago, and our musical director knew this guy had this almost freaky high tenor voice. And so we recorded the song and—I’ll see if I can actually find that original recording for you—and we just recorded it as song qua song, and I remember the sound designer going [imitates sound going off] so much about recording, you know, trying to make this old-fashioned song sound authentic. I mean, it’s just an old song. I said: “It’s not an old song! We wrote it. It’s part of the show.” And actually as opening night gifts, we gave people on one side a clean stereo recording of it, and on the other side—these were cassettes—and on the other side of the cassette, the recording as though it was being played on a 78 [rpm record]. We had fun with that! And also, I had a DAP recorder, and Art and I went to Rhinebeck, where there’s an aerodrome, and they have old-fashioned biplanes. I think they might even have a Curtiss Jenny, which is some plane that’s cheap. By that point we’d started working with [director] Michael Maggio at the Goodman, and he said, “You know, it would be really good if there was something about where she’s doing her pre-flight check list. We played the whole show for Maggio. He really wanted to do it, but that was sort of the one part he felt was missing. So we went up to the aerodrome, and we met with one of the pilots there, and he said, “What do you want? What are you doing?” Well we want to test the propeller.” And we also flew in one of these planes, which was fantastic. And I had my DAP recorder and recorded being at the airplane, and I recorded flybys, and those flybys ended up being part of the sound design because I did really record all of it. So when you listen to that recording, it’s not a Curtiss Jenny, but it’s a biplane in [Old] Rhinebeck [Aerodrome, in Red Hook, NY] flying by.

AB: When did you compose “Out on the Wings” and “Wings,” the last song that she sings?
JL: I’m not sure where in the process that happened, but I did know that what I wanted to go was from E minor to G major. I wanted fundamentally that “Out on the Wing” would be Emily’s first full expression, or, full-ish expression, and that when it came back at the end it would be sort of the same music but it would move into a major key, into the related major. So, yes, you’re absolutely right, they were kind of conceived at the same point.

AB: By this point did you have “The New Daredevils of the Air” and all the themes?

JL: No, I think “Daredevils” might have come later. “Daredevils” was later, but I would have to check with Art on that. And I was kind of going through it moment by moment since we had kind of first draft of the libretto, but things change, you know.

AB: Another thing that I like about the score, and you can tell me if I’m wrong or right, is that the first part, when we’re inside her head, I feel the music is almost atonal, it’s more difficult to find exact keys and where you’re going, whereas towards the end, it’s definitely tonal. I think that the nurse’s song, “Yum, Yummy, Yum,” in the first half is the most tonal music we get, and then towards the end it gets more and more tonal.

JF: It’s never truly atonal. It’s just the tone center keeps a-shifting. Sometimes it’s literally going down by half steps, or going ups by steps, or whatever, because I’m really utilizing a lot of the same melodic material. The [he sings three opening notes] is everywhere, or [sings another theme], and even as she’s waking up [he sings]: “How long have I been here and wrapped in the dark? What is this place?” This [sings the melody with no words] is just a development of that, so if you go through the score, you’ll see a lot of that stuff. It’s not that I was parsimonious with the material, but really kind of using some limited stuff, so I would play with it in different ways, and I would layer it, and I would make things. There are moments that it’s bi-tonal at least. But, yes, for instance when that morphs from “how long have I been here wrapped in the dark?” till “what is this place?” for better or for worse, it’s the second act opening, but it’s based on melodic material you’ve heard before. And “Like the Clouds,” which nobody ever mentioned, was basically an AABA song. It’s basically an AABA song! I mean, it’s a long and extended A.

AB: I haven’t looked into all the songs’ form yet.

JL: I’m pretty sure it is. I’m pretty sure it is. But, I mean, that’s based on, you know [sings], “All in all things could be better.” “All in All” is sort of the verse to “Out on the Wing” and then it becomes [searching in the score], let me see if it’s actually AABA, I think it’s AABA. We got mixed reviews for “Recipe for Cheesecake.” We got mixed reviews for the stuff that was quote, unquote more conventional, like “Yum Yummy Yum,” which is not at all conventional, excuse me! Or “Recipe for Cheesecake,” which was not at all conventional because he’s having frustrations trying to find a word.

AB: And not being able to pronounce it.

JL: Yeah! And that was the first time I was using sampling. We started writing this around the same time that Steve Reich’s “Different Trains” came out, which was the first time that I heard sampling used in kind of melodic fashion, and I initially really wanted to create a score that used
a lot more sampling in it. But we sampled the actress who played the nurse doing the “yums.” I mean, now we could do a hell of a lot easier and better, and it would sound a lot better, but we wanted to do that and have her accompany herself as she was singing her thoughts. [He goes through the song “Like the Clouds” in the score, humming it; he sings] Like the clouds, others here [hums] [sings] like the clouds. And there are times I think the end [hums] far away [hums] B. [Sings] All these thoughts, always there and out of view [hums] something you can hold [hums] [sings] like the clouds. AABA song. Simple AABA song. Mind you, you know, there’s a 5/8 + 7/8 in there [sings the passage] to 3/4 [sings the passage]. Basically, it’s an AABA song, and I don’t think a lot of people got it. But we got that! And we knew that that was part of what we wanted to do in that second part. Also, the second half there are scenes, and if you look at the libretto, one of the things that we did was we cut down the scene in the rehab. We made some judicious trims for the album. But if you go back and look at the libretto there’s more dialogue. There’s more dialogue in the second part of the show. Although, when I say more dialogue, it’s like, there’s maybe two minutes before music starts.

AB: Did you and Arthur decide not to musicalize these dialogues or did you at some point did consider to set these dialogues to music?

JL: No, I don’t think we ever considered setting them.

AB: They always were meant to be spoken?

JL: Yes, I think that was part of the plan. But, I mean, even in the scene that I always find terrifying: the scene where the doctor is pulling out items, like the toothbrush and all of that stuff, Emily struggles to repeat after him. That was always going to be, he was talking, and the music was going to burble, and she was going to be singing.

AB: I really like that he speaks and she sings in the same dialogue.

JL: Right, yeah. There was always going to be spoken dialogue in the first half, just because the first half is mostly her, and I think that’s part of also what convinced me that it was worth adapting was that, you know, music allows you to go inside somebody’s head. And the way the play was structured, it was all inside her head, and all of the wrong conclusions that she’s coming up with, and ultimately becoming self-aware. We also used to joke that she’s going about as “fur” as she can go. I mean, she realizes that. That’s what happens with “Snow.” And “Snow” actually is—you can kind of tell, in a way, that it was the first thing written because it’s the one thing that nothing else in the score sounds like, which is actually fantastic. I mean at that moment, and to actually have Amy singing with her at that moment is very powerful.

AB: In my notes I have that the beginning of “Snow,” introduces a “new theme.” I was going to go back and see if that had been used previously in the score.

JL: No, it’s like a little orphan in there.
AB: My idea was that the theme from “Snow” probably wasn’t used before because now we’re getting to the point where she’s getting better. So dramatically it makes a lot of sense that “Snow” sounds new.

JL: Yes! And actually I went for the harp sound in the accompaniment. It’s just unlike anything else in the score. It’s the only time really when somebody else sings with her, or anybody sings with anybody else.

AB: It’s the only duet.

JL: Yeah! Other than them all singing “Let Me Call You Sweetheart,” which thank God was in the public domain, yeah, it’s the only point where there is that kind of very musical theater moment of two people singing together.

AB: Can you tell me, and this is because I’ve never seen it, how the beginning was staged? She has a hard time with language, but in her head, in her mind she can express her confusion in song. How was that staged? Was there something visual telling us that we are inside her mind?

JL: Yes, there would be people relating to a chair that she sometimes sat in, sometimes didn’t sit in. But sometimes she was outside of the chair wondering around, kind of looking, and we had some vague projections and we had a lot of shadows. There was also, and this was just something that the set designer—was really excellent, a woman named Linda Buchanan—did, but there was these basically cables, ropes, strings, whatever that went across the stage, a little bit like it stays in a biplane that kind of would reconfigure, and the screens would slide in, sometime trees would slide by and the somebody would be revealed, something would be revealed. So she was never confined to the chair, which was either wheelchair, or a bed, or whatever. She was kind of the spirit hovering about. And then sometimes, she would go to the chair and you would kind of see her as others saw her. Like for instance in “Yum, Yummy, Yum.” It was very well staged. I wish you could see it.

AB: Oh yes, it would be great! What about the last song that she sings, “Wings?” Do you remember how that was staged?

JL: She was pretty much in white. She’d had “Snow” with Amy, and snow on the stage, snow on the bench, and at certain point Amy realized that she’s dying, that she’s having a relapse. She was basically in a pool of light. And as she got to the very end, the pool of light kind of got more intense.

AB: Did she sing the song standing up till the very end?

JL: Yeah. Basically she kind of moves away from the bench and does the song. It was very simply staged. But the stroke itself is very kind of impressionistic. When people do productions, they generally use the sound design that we had in the show. But if we did it again, now there’s so much stuff that we could do. And, I mean, God knows, the orchestra! The other thing that I really wanted to do was create an acoustic-electronic orchestration. I really felt that when she has the stroke, she goes into a world that has just a different sound, and so I used basically three
synthesizers that I had, and I did a lot of layering, it was very rare that you would literally just
hear the piano—and I had a little piano module—but it was rare that you would just hear a piano
module without something else being triggered, because I just wanted to have that other sound,
but then I wanted to have the warmth of the cello playing.

AB: I love the clarinet part.

JL: Oh, good!

AB: I think these are wonderful themes, and the clarinet—I like the cello too—but the clarinet
has this warm sound, and sometimes you put some solos for the clarinet that I think are just
wonderful.

JL: It was nice because it was pretty spare. I mean, I have to say, I didn’t realize at the time that
clarinet and flute was a really difficult double. And the guy who played it Off-Broadway was a
really good clarinet player. He was not such a good flute player. But it was all right. We were
able to mix and kind of make it work fine. But it turns out that flute and sax is an excellent
double, and there are people who play clarinet and flute, but it was a harder double to pull off
than I guess in retrospect. Also I was working with kind of the early generation of synthesizer
that really couldn’t play two sounds at the same time. Today I might have used just one keyboard
player who’s mapped out to play something on the left hand and a different sound in the right
hand. I mean, it really was kind of the DX7 that had come in the late ’80s.

AB: Were there songs that you composed and never made it to the show? Or made it but then
were cut?

JL: Yes, there was stuff that we wrote. I’m trying to remember.

AB: And along with that, was the show going to be any longer than it is now?

JL: I don’t think so because it was a full night for one act in Arthur Kopit’s play, and we wanted
to keep that structure, that seemed to make most sense because I just don’t think you ever want
to leave that world. I think that if you leave that world, you’re dead! Arthur wrote this song
where Billy and Emily are having that [he sings] “Is it ever,” you know, “come back all of it?,”
which is one hundred percent, completely new scene that Art wrote, that is nowhere in the Kopit
play. But there had been some occupational therapy scene where they were together. I remember
it was in five, and they were counting things in five or something like that, and they were doing
some kind of a task, and as they were doing the task, Emily was sort of singing “does it come
back.” And we could just never make that song work, and then we were kind of, “what the hell
with it, let’s just make it a scene.” We don’t need it anyways. So we worked on that. And there
was that original “how long have I been here and wrapped in the dark,” and I think all these
things are completely lost at this point, I mean, I may have a notebook somewhere where I have
sketches, but, as I said, it’s somewhere. Stuff took a lot to find its form, you know. And I’m sure
there are kind of earlier versions of certain things, but, you know, I mean, it was a very weird
and good workshop in that the Goodman [Theatre, in Chicago] had already committed to do the
show. This was Michael Maggio’s first directing assignment after having a bilateral lung
transplant. He had cystic fibrosis and was one of the very first people to essentially have to get both of his lungs transplanted at the same time. He had been a very sickly man, and now he was sort of young and vigorous at age 40. I remember people came in to audition and they saw him, and he had been hallowed, sucked-in cheeks carrying an oxygen, and now he’s sort of this vigorous guy and people were literally crying in auditions. And, anyway, we got Linda Stephens [to play Emily]. We’d actually hired a New York actress whose agent insisted on more money, and the Goodman was like, “No, it’s Most Favored Nation, everyone gets paid the same thing, blah, blah, blah, blah,” and she said, “Well, then fine, I’m not going to do it.” And with two weeks, I think, before the workshop, Maggio said, “Well, there is this woman in Chicago, she couldn’t come in when we were doing, her name is Linda Stephens, she actually did the play before, but I think she’s really good musically.” When I heard her, I thought, “this woman can do it, and probably better than the woman that we had actually selected.” Art did not come for the first three days of rehearsal because he thought that I was just going to sit there and spend all of our time teaching this music, and she walked in pretty much note perfect on top of being a superb actress and a superb musician. She’d also been a professional violinist, so she really just knew her stuff and she knew the play backwards, forwards, and sideways, having done it, so we just started staging it. And I have to say fundamentally by the end of the workshop—I think we had two weeks to work on it—the whole thing had been staged at least in a kind of basic, basic way, and it’s the only time this ever happened to me, but we kind of looked at ourselves, and we were like, “Well, it’s kind of ready to go, all it needs is the technical stuff.” So that’s literally what happened. I then worked on the orchestrations for it being done in Chicago, but there was very little tweaking and changing from that first workshop, which was around July 4 of 1993 [recte 1992], to the fall, when it opened in October.

AB: Why did the recording not come out until 1995?

JL: Because we didn’t have a long enough run at the Public Theater after we opened in New York. And the irony was that we got fantastic reviews in Chicago, I mean rave reviews in Chicago. It a super hit in Chicago.

AB: I’ve only read the reviews from here [New York].

JL: Oh, no, no, the reviews in the Chicago Tribune and especially in the Sun Times were just rapturous. Also, The Chicago Reader. I mean it really got rave reviews, and it kept on getting extended in Chicago, and all these producers came up to see the show. One of the reasons producers came up was that David Richards, who was at the time the Sunday critic of the New York Times, came to see the show and wrote this rave review in the New York Times. You know, the kind of review you dream of having. And all these people came and we had a lot of offers to take it to Broadway. There were offers to take it Off-Broadway in a commercial production, and we decided to go to the Public Theater because the Public Theater was going to just co-produce it with the Goodman, use our production and put in on the Newman theater. We thought we were totally protected by doing that, and if we got good enough reviews in New York, then all the other stuff would happen. Little did we know that Frank Rich, who was the daily critic of the Times kinda had a feud with David Richards, who was a Sunday critic, and he kind of didn’t want Richards to be making shows or whatever. And so I think it was very—I surmise, I can’t actually say that—I think his review was sort of a refutation. If you look at Richards’s review
and if you look at Rich’s review, it’s kind of a refutation of what Richards had said. And the truth is in New York it was a different experience than it had been in Chicago, despite the fact that it was the same cast. In Chicago it had been in a smaller theater, and it kind of exploded off the stage. In New York it was in a larger theater that was looking down, so there was a slight remove to it. It was actually to my mind a better performance because they had had two and a half months to perform in front of an audience, and I thought they were much richer and much more nuanced. But anyway, so what happened was a few days after Rich’s review came out, and it was kind of mixed to negative, JoAnne Akalaitis, who was running the Public Theater got fired.

AB: Oh, that didn’t help!

JL: Exactly! It was like having a movie in a studio turn around. And what happened was they just didn’t want to spend money advertising it despite the fact that we got raves in Newsday, and Variety, and a lot of other places. They didn’t advertise. We got six Drama Desk nominations. They just didn’t spend the money, they all were so worried about whether they were going to keep their jobs. And it was actually annoying because I think they could’ve done more and they just really didn’t. And it was a great opening night party, people were happy, people hung around and then Rich’s review came out, and it was like, “oh,” you know, that was kind of the power of the New York Times at the time. So the answer is that there was not a recording made and then I sort of made it happen myself. I knew Billy Rosenfield at RCA, and he liked it but he didn't have the money. And I said, “Well, if I raise the money, will you put it out?” Then, we won the Gilman & Gonzales-Fala Award, and so went to them and we got them to put money in; we went to Rodgers & Hammerstein [Foundation], who decided that they were going to represent it for licensing, they threw some money at it, too. BMG threw money at it to put in the libretto, booklet, you know, all of that. So between it all we cobbled it together, and I got in touch with Thomas Shepard, who of course produced a lot of my very favorite original cast recordings, including all those Sondheim shows, and he loved the show and he wanted to do it.

AB: When you finally recorded it in 1995, you trimmed some parts of the show, but it’s pretty much the show…

JF: Yeah, it’s pretty much the show. I mean, actually, I mean, you know, you know the history of the show was that Kopit wrote it as a radio play and then it was Robert Brustein who convinced him that he could turn it into a stage play for Yale Rep., where it was initially done. And when Tom Shepard and I started talking about how we are going to approach this recording we actually kind of agreed that we wanted to turn it into a radio play, we wanted to turn it back into a radio play. So, if you listen to the recording, you’ll see that it plays a lot with the stereo feel or it’ll add extra kind of reverb to her at certain points. In “Making Your Naming Powers” and others, we always ran the microphone through processors. That’s where that kind of electronic/acoustic thing was really fun to have because we were really right at the edge of it as it was starting to happen and you could make that happen, so they were all miked, although the good thing was a lot of people had no idea that the show is miked at all. They just thought it was this kind of nice acoustic thing, but of course, it had to do it, and we were playing with synthesizers. But essentially it’s the original orchestration and the original players.
AB: When you were writing this music, did you have any other piece of musical theater that you thought—or maybe still think—is similar in the way you were structuring the music and working with the themes?

JL: Honestly? No. I mean, it was hilarious because reviews came out, and people were going, “It sounds like Gian Carlo Menotti.”

AB: I think I’ve read that!

JL: I didn’t know anything about Menotti.

AB: I read a reviews that said that it sounded like Broadway opera from the 1950s, like Menotti.

JL: Right! And I swear to God, I’d never heard any Gian Carlo Menotti at that point. I mean, the only Broadway operas I had heard were Porgy and Bess and Street Scene. Neither of which has anything to do with Wings. I was influenced to a certain degree, as I said, by “Different Trains” by Steve Reich, but I didn’t know a lot of Steve Reich at that point, and, I mean, yeah there’s a kind of minimalistic aspect to “Out on the Wing,” and the way that I shift a lot of time signatures probably to some degree owns a bit to Reich, but I wasn’t consciously trying to evoke any particular composer. I probably was A. responding to the material, B. you know, what was in the air at the time, but you know Jonathan Larson was writing Rent at the same time, and he was listening to different stuff in the air, right?

AB: Right!


AB: Joni Michell.

JL: Yeah! And I think Jonathan was maybe a little more influence by more contemporary pop, like ’80s, ’90s pop. And Michael John is another guy with his own voice. It’s very distinctive. I can always tell a Michael John score. Which ones are you looking at for that?

AB: Hello Again.

JL: Hello Again is a cool piece because it also plays with forms in a really interesting way. I think there’s great, great stuff in that piece.

AB: And similar to Wings, it’s not sung the whole time, but the way the music permeates the scenes, you go from spoken dialogue to sung ones, to recitatives. In my opinion, it shares that with your score, the flow between all these.

JL: Yeah! Hello Again was around the same time.

AB: Do you like the British mega musicals that were huge in the ’80s? Was there any…
JL: Influence?

AB: No, I wouldn’t say influence, I was going to say anything that you enjoyed or not about them?

JL: Of them I actually thought there was a lot about Phantom [of the Opera] that I liked. I felt like he [Andrew Lloyd Webber] was parsimonious with his musical ideas. I don’t think people give him enough credit for being a real composer, and I think he is a real composer. And it was, and still is, brilliantly staged by Hal Prince. You should go see that again just to look at the staging. It is so well done. There’s a reason why that thing’s a hit. Les Mis, again, I loved that mostly for the staging because I thought the original staging by John Caird and Trevor Nunn was brilliant, they took sort of everything they had learned on Nicholas Nickleby and used it to great effect. I’m not a super fan of the music, especially because is all the same, it wasn’t until the end of the first act that I realized, “Oh, it’s all the same song.” This is a great thing, but I need more variety. But that’s me! People love it!

AB: Do you think there was a reaction from American composers to the British invasion?

JL: They were just writing what they were writing. If there was any reaction was probably because we were all children of Sondheim. And the thing is, it annoyed the hell out of me that reviews would say, “Oh, influenced by Sondheim” or “not Sondheim.”

AB: That has appeared in reviews of Michael John’s scores…

JL: Everybody! Because if you tried to write anything that was kind of intelligent or playing with form or, you know, not super melodic in a very traditional way, then you’re Sondheim-mixed. And the thing is Sondheim is sui generis. There was never anybody like him before, there will never be anybody like him afterwards. But, yeah, I mean, that whole dictum of “content dictates form” is something that we’ve always sort of taken to heart. And I think it’s absolutely true of Jason Robert Brown and Michael John. Probably not true of Finn as much. I think he just writes what he writes.

AB: He has said that he needs Lapine. He even said that he calls is “Lapinization” of his score because he needs Lapine to come in and help him with structure.

JL: Yes!

AB: I am going to read Kopit’s original play, which I haven’t yet.

JL: Yes, you should read the play and read the libretto, and you’ll see how much Art kind of beautifully distilled Kopit’s writing into lyrics. I don’t think people give him enough credit for the work that he did. But he did a fantastic work. Nor do I think that people give enough credit for how he moved away from Kopit and just created his own scenes. I think it’s a very masterful libretto.
AB: I heard from people who saw the original play, and they said that they cried a lot and were moved, it was a beautiful play.

JL: I’ll tell you, by the time we hopped in New York, I think Kopit had more people coming to the musical then we did on opening night. He became a real enthusiastic advocate for the musical. I think the play is brilliant too.

AB: Ok, I need to read the play, the original.

JL: Yes, you have to read the play. You should read the original and compare to the libretto, and just kind of see, it’s very impressive, it’s definitely worth it.

AB: Especially because the beginning of the musical is pretty much her soliloquy, I’m curious to see how that appears in the original play.

JL: Oh, you’ll be amazed. And music definitely adds a layer of interpretation that you wouldn’t have in the play. If you’re speaking “globigde and rubidge” and all of that stuff, which is right out of Kopit, you know, this kind of made up words that frankly once you have seen people who are aphasic, you get it, and interacted with people who were aphasic. It’s fascinating, the brain is fascinating, the way it works, the different processes. God, the week we opened in Chicago, or maybe the week after, there was a convention of neurologists in Chicago. Of course, the cast all went to Northwestern Hospital, and they met with neurologists, they saw therapy sessions, or whatever, and actually we got some really good feedback from neurologists who were like, “Yes, this is a pretty accurate depiction of aphasia, and actually it’s good for us to see it from the patient’s point of view.

AB: I am always fascinated to see what physicians think of medicine on stage.

JL: But every production that has been done, I think, they always somehow try to get involved with the medical community. This is always going to be a hard sell. “Hey, let’s go see a musical about a woman who has a stroke,” right? It’s really hard to get people in the door. Once you get people in the door, I think they recognize that you know maybe there’s someone in their family, or they know somebody or whatever who has been through this. Or, just dealing with a sick relative is something that they can realize, the emotional power of this thing came out only at a workshop presentation at the Goodman. And right around the moment of “Out on the Wing,” the press department, who were three women at the Goodman, all three women, opened their purses, pulled out Kleenex, and I was like, “Oh!” I thought that at the end of the show maybe the Kleenex would come out, but they’re in the middle of the show, the Kleenex was coming out, and I thought, “Oh, ok, alright they’re emotionally invested in this piece!” And I have to say, the best audiences by far were the ones where she sang the very end, you heard the final notes and that chord at the end, and there was just absolute silence. After a moment of silence, then the applause would come. You know, you’re just annoyed when somebody start applauding before. If it was an audience that was really with it, you’d know.

AB: They need some seconds—the same with a symphony or a concerto.
JL: Yes, I always love that! You know, when a conductor slowly puts the baton down, and even when their hands are at their side, they’re still like a moment, and then you hear the applause. So yes, there were some incredible moments. I think we really did affect people.
Appendix F

Interview with Galt MacDermot

Interview with Galt MacDermot, June 16, 2015, New York, NY. His son, Vince MacDermot, participated in the interview.

Alexandre Bádué (AB): Can you tell me a little bit about how you wrote the music for The Human Comedy? What were you given to begin with, as far as text goes?

Galt MacDermot (GM): That’s a good question. I don’t really remember. Was it a play or was it a movie?

AB: Originally it was a book. It was a movie, then a book. Then William Dumaresq made the adaptation.

GM: Oh, Dumaresq! He and I had been in several things before that, so I asked him if he would like to do this, and he loved that story. So that’s how he wrote the script. He lived in England at the time. He was a Canadian guy from Vancouver, but we met in London when I was working there for a while, and we did a few little shows together.

Vince MacDermot (VM): They did Isabel’s a Jezebel in London. And my father and Bill collaborated as Fergus MacRoy and Angus MacRoy, a singing team. Bill [Dumaresq] wrote the words, they’re folk songs. And Human Comedy, well, is a big work! There are eighty-six songs in it.

GM: Well, it’s basically an opera. I was trying to write what could be called an opera. And Joe Papp, who was very open to everything, said he’d do it, so we did it down there, at Joe Papp’s. And Bill wrote all of that, yes.

AB: Do you remember the process to write the music for that?

GM: I don’t remember. I think I took me a summer. We have a little place in Canada, where I’m from, a cottage up there near a lake, so I went there and just wrote it. It took a lot of writing because it was quite a long thing.

AB: So you had most of the text and you were writing the music to that text?

GM: Yes, Bill Dumaresq wrote the text I worked from.

AB: I’m asking that because just yesterday I was at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, and they have tapes of you singing the entire show. It’s part of the Joe Papp collection.

GM: Really?
AB: Yes! It is literally the whole score, you and a piano.

GM: Just me and the piano?

AB: Yes.

GM: Well, I had to do it at some point.

AB: I thought it was fascinating that it included everything…

GM: I didn’t know they had a tape of that!

AB: Yes. It’s a cassette. They haven’t turned it into a CD yet.

GM: Is that in good form?

AB: Yes, it was in good form. I didn’t see the actual tape, but I listened to it and could hear everything perfectly: your piano playing and your voice. And I thought that it was very nice that you included all the music from The Human Comedy, and the cassette is dated 1983, no month or day.

GM: 1983, well, it took me probably a few months to do it. After I got it done, I sang it to Joe [Papp], but Joe was determined to do it anyway. He loved that show, the story.

VM: I remember you saying that it was difficult to work what key it would be to move from one song to the next because of the singers, who was going to sing it. That took work to do.

GM: Yeah, I couldn’t tolerate it, but that worked out. Basically it was an opera, so it was all song. And Joe, you know, was very open to that. He liked opera, I mean, he liked music, his thing was music.

AB: Do you remember what was the most challenging part of it?

GM: Well, picking the right keys for all of the songs, to move from one to the next. Actually, deciding how much of that text to set, so I took the whole text and made it all sung. I just used everything that he [Dumaresq] wrote. And only Joe Papp would do such a thing. And he did it. We performed it. It was, well, we got mixed reviews!

AB: I think that for 1983, this was kind of new, musicals that had everything sung. Jesus Christ Superstar had done it more than a decade earlier. Cats was new in 1983.

GM: That’s true!

AB: But they had come from England.
GM: Yeah! There were a few that were doing it. *Jesus Christ Superstar* reminds me of one of those things that people just sang.

VM: I remember a review. Remember that girl Patricia Hoag-Simon, her husband, John Simon, was a very critical writer for the *New York Magazine*? But he loved it, and he said the latest person to blur the lines between musical and opera. That’s how he described it.

GM: I remember it. That was an interesting review.

AB: Also in the Joe Papp collection, I found an invitation for the first reading of *The Human Comedy*. And it took place on October 21, 1983.

GM: At the Public Theater?

AB: At the Public Theater. And the invitation says, “Come listen to the reading of this opera-musical by Galt MacDermot.” They didn’t know what to call *The Human Comedy*, so they used “opera-musical.”

[Galt and Vice laugh]

AB: But I heard that you were commissioned to write an opera by an opera company. Is this right?

GM: I was. This is what I was going to do it for, but I don’t think they wanted it. They read the book and said, “No, we don’t want that story.”

AB: How can one not want that story?

[Vince laughs]

GM: So I didn’t bother doing it. I didn’t do anything for them. It was out in the West in Canada.

VM: Do you have the recording of it?

AB: I do. I own a copy.

GM: Of the show at the Papp Theater?

AB: Yes, well, the cast album. But I have to tell you that I really enjoyed listening to your tape yesterday because the way you played some of the songs, to my hearing, was a little bit different from the final version.

GM: Oh, sure!

AB: And I could hear your piano playing. The vocal lines you sing are just as they are in the show, but your accompaniment was slightly different every now and then.
GM: I would think so. What you do on a piano is different every day. I don’t remember when I did that tape or where or for whom.

AB: They call it rehearsal tape, so probable you did it for rehearsal, for the actors…

GM: Probably.

AB: Did you write the vocal arrangements as well for the choir?

GM: Yes, and the actual orchestration.

AB: Do you know if the idea of having the chorus singing songs that comment on the action, like “Beautiful Music,” and songs that narrate the action…

GM: Well, I think that’s the kind of thing they do in musicals and operas. They have the chorus. I don’t know whether it was my idea or Bill’s idea, or if just happened. But you have to orchestrate a musical as best you can. We basically got the vocals, mostly voices, so you try to get variety out of that. I don’t really remember much about those decisions. They just came.

AB: And also the idea of having them all onstage, all the actors were on the stage all the time, right?

GM: All the time?

AB: That’s what I understand!

VM: That’s true! They were, like a chorus in the back.

AB: The libretto that Dumaresq wrote says something along the lines of, “The mother moves downstage, does her acting and sings whatever song, and then she goes to the back, and then next characters move downstage.” So they go from the war in Europe to this little city, Ithaca, in literally a second.

VM: That’s right, this is how it was. There were risers I think. And as I recall, we had the Anspacher Theater, and stage left, from the audience side, or maybe the right side, was where the string section was. Everybody was onstage. And the cast members never went offstage. They would step backwards or come forward. The leads would come forward into the thrust. And then they stepped back and then they’d sing as the background, as a Greek chorus.

AB: I think that the music does a lot to help that.

GM: Well, that helped my music! I like to be able to use the chorus as accompaniment.

AB: And that’s what happens there!
GM: I enjoyed it! It’s funny talking about it. It’s like a long time ago! But I really enjoyed doing it.

AB: Have you seen it done lately?

GM: No.

VM: No, we went to Queens at the APAC [Astoria Performing Arts Center], and they did an excellent job. They had a small band, but they were terrific. And that show is a difficult show because there’s so much music, you just have to keep in time, moving. And they did a good job.

AB: Can you tell me a little bit about your musical taste, composers that you’ve always liked?

GM: Well, my father was a piano player. He played everything, he played the piano every day of his life just for fun. He was a professor, a school teacher, but he loved music, and so I picked up the violin. I played the violin with him every day, we used to play. And that’s about my early musical education. I studied in Cape Town in Africa.

AB: Piano performance?

GM: No, composition. So that was my training. Then I came back to Montréal. I studied in Montréal as an organist and played and wrote music. And I’ve doing it ever since. But it’s interesting to talk about something like *The Human Comedy* because that was a toughie. I don’t know why we did that. It was though!

AB: I’m glad that you did!

GM: I’m glad I did too! I liked it! And it was after *Hair* and *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, those were most of the Broadway I’d done. In fact, it was probably the last Broadway show I did.

VM: Well, just the revival of *Hair*. But that was twenty years later.

AB: And what kind of music do you like to listen to? What would you say it’s your favorite kind of music?

GM: Well, I like all music, really. But what got me into taking music *per se* seriously was jazz, when I was thirteen, fourteen. There was a bunch of kids and they liked to listen to jazz, and I started listening with them. And I got into that. And then when I went to Cape Town, I studied music, I realized there was more to music than jazz, although I still liked it. And that’s about it! But I like all music.

VM: Dad, tell him about the drumming and the dancing…

GM: In Africa?

---

1 This was in APAC’s 2010–2011 season. The production ran in May 2011.
GM: African music is just fantastic! I mean, maybe I realized jazz just to start on it, to get into it, but I’d drive my car somewhere in Cape Town, and you’d see a bunch of guys in a field dancing with drumming, and I’d stop the car and listen, and it was just fantastic! And it was a lot of that. There was always a lot of music everywhere. I don’t know if it’s still like that, but it was like then.

AB: So that was something very different that you exposed yourself to?

GM: Yes, what a wild thing music is! It covers all kinds of things.

AB: What about theater music?

GM: The theater is the best place to do music because in itself it is dramatic. So the best place to do it is in a theater. And I didn't think about those things. When I came to New York…

VM: You played in the [1964] World’s Fair, played in some strip clubs…

GM: That’s true! But the first show I did was Hair.

VM: With Joe Papp and Jimmy Rado and Jerry Ragni.

GM: Hair. It got me into this theater world. I liked Joe Papp, a very nice guy, and a very smart guy! I liked working with him. I don't like all of the theatrical world. There’s a lot about theater that I don’t like, but if you’re going to do music, the best place to do it is in a theater.

AB: So you didn’t grow up listening to musicals?

GM: Not musicals! Dad loved all kinds of music and he’d come home with the latest music and played it. And some of it I liked, some of it I didn’t. What really got me was Duke Ellington and that kind of jazz. I like jazz, that kind of stuff.

AB: Did you like, in the ’60s, rock and roll, the Beatles, or even before, like Elvis Presley?

GM: Yes, I liked all that stuff. I mean, that was part of the world that we came to here. I’m from Montréal and I was a church organist, but wanted to get into all that, you know, pop music and that stuff. So we came down here, and that’s what was going on. A lot of really good music happening here. What was the year?

VM: 1964 when you came.

AB: That’s the year the Beatles got here.

GM: The Beatles and everybody else got here.
AB: One thing that I like about your shows, *Hair, Two Gents*, and *The Human Comedy*, is that you combine a lot of different genres, or types of music, and in my view, that too can be dramatic.

GM: Music is a very tricky thing. It can get boring. So you got to change it. And that means changing the style, changing all the ingredients. That’s really when I realized I was in the theater business. But I studied organ, my father, as I mentioned, played everything on the piano, and I grew up playing the violin and listening to that stuff. So that’s really the basis of working in the theater: it’s variety! You have to do it because it gets boring. If the song that you’re listening to sounds like the song you just heard, you don’t want to be bothered. There is a lot of music, different styles of music that are great. South American music and all.

VM: *Two Gentlemen of Verona* has a sense of humor, too! I read some very good reviews of a production in St. Louis. I don’t remember the guy’s name, but, my goodness, people loved the show based on what they said.

GM: When was that, Vince?

VM: I think a few years ago. I’d have to look it up. I just encountered it, you know…

GM: Oh, I see it.

AB: Do you remember how much Wilford Leach, the director, helped create *The Human Comedy*?

VM: Downtown it was just very spark, just the costumes. And then uptown they used projections.

GM: Did he do uptown, too?

VM: Yeah, yeah.

GM: Yes, I have mixed feelings about my memory over Leach. I don’t remember much about him. But he did the show. I guess he was o.k.

AB: I was going to ask if you remembered anything that he did that was very important for the show or that you hadn’t thought of before.

GM: He did what was written. You know, it’s all song, which he didn’t object. And he managed to get enough of decent reviews so it ran for a while. Other than that, I don’t remember much.

AB: He liked your music, probably!

GM: He might have! He was a hard man to read.

AB: Do you go see musicals?
GM: Well, I can’t say that I still do. I mean, I will. There’s a couple of things I want to do or see. I can’t think of them now, but there are a couple of things I want to see. I would like to see another musical just to remind myself what it’s like. You know, the impact of a bunch of singers singing a song is huge. And I want that feeling again. So I may go see something.

VM: We [Vince and his wife] went to see [the 2015 Lincoln Center revival of] The King and I. It was nice!

GM: Was there a good chorus?

VM: Yeah, they had a good chorus. The female voices were stronger. The lead is a Japanese guy [Ken Watanabe], I guess, and it was little bit hard to understand, but he’s a great actor. You know, he’s funny too. And the band was really good! I mean, in tune and beautiful.

AB: Is there any song that you wrote and consider to be your favorite?

GM: No. I can’t even think of anything that I wrote and that I like, but I like what I like and what I’m doing. Certain shows were fun to do more because of the people I was working with, that makes a big difference. But writing music is always nice.

AB: Do you play your own music a lot?

GM: Every now and then. Most every day.

AB: Do you remember if there were songs that ended up not making to the show?

GM: The Human Comedy? I don’t think so.

AB: Well, the show has eighty-six songs!

GM: Well, it was basically an opera. It was all sung, and, you know, the script is good.

VM: Bill Dumaresq.

GM: No, but the actual…

VM: Oh, Saroyan.

GM: What a really good writer. You didn’t have to skip because it was good. You just had to see whether you could fit it in, but I think we used everything.

AB: Do you think that the fact that you were able to use all of the eighty-six songs was because Joe Papp was there? Had it been a difference producer…
GM: I don’t think anybody else would have done it. There’s a tremendous prejudice against Saroyan because he was, they say, anti-Semitic. So, I heard about that after, you know, that he was anti-Semitic, but what does that have to do with me or the show? And there’s none of that in the show.

AB: Or in the libretto!

GM: No.

VM: Who knows if it’s even true, you know! Saroyan is an Armenian name…

GM: He was a trouble maker. I think he said things that irritated somebody, but at the moment he said a lot of things. But there’s nothing anti-Semitic in the show. And Joe Papp didn’t care. But I think there was a slight prejudice against that show.

VM: It’s almost the same prejudice against every show. Any artistic endeavor has got people that found something. I mean, what can you say? My friend would say, this is New York, people are against sunshine.

GM: He would never do an anti-Semitic show. I think there is one line of text that I could say we could take it out, but it’s there, so it’s part of what the character wants to say!

AB: Did you read the original book when you were writing the music, or before?

GM: The original book?

AB: Saroyan’s original book.

GM: I used what Bill wrote. But I did read the book first, and I said to Bill, “Listen, that’s a good story,” and he knew the book. He was very excited to do it.

AB: I read that the Canadian opera company that first commissioned you didn’t want that story because it was American.

GM: Yeah, I think that’s true. I think that’s why they didn’t do it.

AB: And then they asked you to do something different and you said, well…

GM: I said, no, I want to do this. So I had to hang around for someone to do it. That’s when I called Joe Papp. And he said, “Sure.”

AB: You wrote the music for the entire show with what you had, Dumaresq’s libretto. Was that the reason why you thought of it as an opera? Is that why you decided to musicalize the entire script?
GM: Well, I think by that time I got in my head it was an opera because people in Canada wanted me to write an opera. But then when I told them I want to do this, they didn’t want to do this. But I still wanted to write an opera.

AB: And this is why you have music from beginning to end?

GM: Yes, and Joe Papp was quite happy with that.

AB: I’ve seen the word “oratorio” used to refer to what the show is.

GM: They’re very fussy about what words they use. Truth is, it’s an opera. It’s all sung, it’s an opera, to my mind, at least. But if I did an analysis, it holds your attention for two hours, or whatever it is, and it sort of did. I can’t believe I did all that stuff!

AB: You did! And it’s beautiful!

VM: It was a lot of work. I remember him remarking…

GM: I had to wake up early!

AB: You don’t like waking up early?

GM: That was a little earlier than usual. In fact, I had to work all morning to get it written, for a couple of months. But I liked the story and I liked the characters. I liked writing it. Saroyan had a different mentality than other writers of his time. I liked it!
Appendix G

Interview with Jeanine Tesori

Interview with Jeanine Tesori, June 15, 2015, New York, NY.

Alexandre Bádué (AB): Can you talk a little bit about how you conceived the songs for Caroline, or Change specifically for the different families: Caroline’s family, the Gellman family, and what I call the Brechtian characters, the laundry machine, the dryer? How did you organize your compositional process to create musical continuity?

Jeanine Tesori (JT): The thing that interested me about the soundscape of Caroline was how it was, like many things, a microcosm of the world. Inside this house were people who wouldn’t, except for the circumstances and for economy, wouldn’t be together. Caroline would not be in that basement if she didn’t need to earn a living. She wouldn’t be there voluntarily. If Betty hadn’t died, Rose wouldn’t be there, therefore her grandparents wouldn’t be there. The classical music wouldn’t be laying on top of the ancestral, you know, the field song. “I Got Four Kids” is based on field holler, and the back beat is created by chance, which in this country there always is to the invisible worker that’s holding up the economy, it’s always so. And one of the things that was interesting to Tony [Kushner] and is very interesting to me is that there’s always seems to be in the death of slavery some form that’s ongoing. So back then there were field workers, unpaid, held against their will, and they became Norwich workers, and now a lot of them are in jail. So it’s this transformation, but it’s really transference, that happened. So that was really interesting to me, and I wondered how it appeared in a house like that. When I started working with Tony, and received the libretto, the text to me shouldn’t be so elevated that it comes out. I’m very interested in kind of going against the artifice of musicals so the audience doesn’t even know that they’re singing. It doesn’t announce that they’re singing unless it’s for comic effect or something like that. So then I was wondering, “Well, what if Caroline sang to a Mozart concerto that Stuart was practicing, and it stops and starts?” And so they create a new counterpoint. If we’re lucky, we’re part of a motet. If we’re lucky, we’re a part of something that’s provided the cantus firmus as layer, and then there’s another layer, and another layer, and therefore that to me is a form of composition by texture and counterpoint. And the thing that really I was after was, how did things get together that we don’t even know until they are layered side by side? So all through that score, you know, the very theme that she hums in the beginning, then becomes the washing machine, then in the very end becomes the sort of descant that the washer sings really slowly of saying what tragedy and victory, how you spin it just a little bit away. So I was just trying to comb it all the way through, so it was working horizontally. Vertically the layering worked just like a house, going from the basement, to the first floor and the street, all the way up to the bedrooms, so that it’s like counterpoint built up the floors of the house, from the earliest in scene 1 in the basement [between Caroline, the washer, and the radio] to the Chanukah party, when most everybody is onstage.

AB: The moon in the sky sings, too.
JT: Right, different from Caroline, but both do vocalise. And everybody who comes in brings a new song. That was my idea. The other thing that started happening was that I noticed and said to Tony: “If this is all happening in November, Christmas is coming, which means there’s more pressure on Caroline to get money; that can be very helpful to us. Let’s start the second act with one of those old time ‘Santa’s Coming.’” This became “Santa Comin’ Caroline,” and the girl groups did all the time. And yet another thing: do you know this theory that there are only seven plots in all stories? One is about the stranger who comes to town and changes everything, which in Caroline would be grandpa Stopnick. But musically in this, the strangers that come to town are the strange melodies that are being played in the basement through the radio about Civil Rights, about Malcolm X, about the freedom marches. All these things with the sixties beat that are coming in, which Caroline has no idea. But she can hear them. She can’t see them, but she can hear them because they don’t have a TV. So all of those things were things that we started writing about, that were spinning around, and then how to dramatize them and make them work, make them concrete, and not just abstractions of ideas. That started it all. And then we just started weaving. It was a very overwhelming project to me at first, but I’m overwhelmed by every project, so the only way in I find is if I can write something I can grab right away, something like “I Hate the Bus,” which was the first music I wrote, just an A and a B, it was not even a song form. And one of the things I said to Tony when we started was “I’m not interested in gluing some melodies where there’s no ritornello. I don’t know how you lock your ears around it for a theater audience. The audience is not coming to a new music festival.

AB: Do you mean you didn’t want the musical to be through-composed, as a run-on movement?

JT: Exactly! Audiences have expectations is a certain way, which I don’t mind meeting, but I also like pushing. I just do mind bypassing them. I don’t know how to keep a piece like this. Refrains are very, very important. And reprises, too.

AB: Repetition…

JT: Repetition is our friend! And Tony hated repetition. And I said, “If there is no repetition because you don’t have anything else to say, think of repetition as a contract with the audience.” So we had a lot of talks about song form, rhythmic recitative, and that kind of stuff. And then we had to just make this story work with music. Have you noticed that there’s no inside incident until scene five, when the coin drops begin? It’s all setup, setup, setup, setup. And I said, “We’re going to catch a lot of shit for that,” and Tony was like, “Okay, alright, I’m fine with that.” But not a lot of people had patience to be with circumstance, characters, scenes, all of that stuff until the fifth scene because nothing happens. When Caroline sings, “Nothing happens in Louisiana,” we really mean it. Kennedy dies [in scene 4], so that’s the event, but it’s nothing, that’s circumstantial. These conversations started everything, and literally we just wrote, we just wrote sort of inside out.

AB: Did you have that approach of layers to create counterpoint because of Tony’s libretto, or is it something that you always consider as a composer?
JT: I always use that approach. But because it is semi-auto biographical, there was so much in place already in the libretto. There was a lot of editing that we did together, and he has an unbelievable appetite for rewriting. This was the only reason why I did it.

AB: That’s a good thing for a writer!

JT: Yes!

AB: Did you discuss with Tony the lines that were not to be sung?

JT: Well, when we started out, he thought this was book musical. I said: “It’s not a book musical. I don’t know how I know that, I just know it.” A lot of that stuff is really hard to verbalize because it’s based on, you know, the inner pulse. And he said, “I think you’re wrong.” I said, “Great, let’s throw a workshop of the first act and then let’s see where we are.” And then he called me that night after the workshop, [he said,] “You’re right.” And I said that it’s not really about being right, it was just the piece, that’s what the piece was calling for. It’s a kind of an opera of sorts. I don’t know why! I don’t really have an intellectual reason for why, except that it seemed like to fit.

AB: I find fascinating scenes like the one with Stuart and Noah: one speaks a line, the other sings another, then they break into song, and they speak again. Or the scene where Noah and Caroline fight: they sing most of it, but then Caroline speaks for some time, and then she sings to him, “That’s where Jews go.” I love the alternation of spoken and sung in the same dialogue and am curious to know how this decision is made.

JT: I think the speaking becomes the uncomfortable thing when most of it is sung, and it calls attention to itself in a way. Stuart as a musician, and you know as a musician, it’s just based on repetition and repetition, and so your house is filled with hamster wheels of phrases again and again. I grew up doing that. You don’t play for the piece, and so the very end of your practice is built on one section that you do again and again and again. And to the listener, I think, it’s almost like a trance kind of thing. Now especially for Stuart, who would much rather be doing that than dealing with his son, his clarinet practicing is fractured by words. He can’t quite find the melody. We talked about how people can’t quite find the melody when they’re uncomfortable. I don’t know if that’s an organizing principle, but I remember these conversations about people who can’t break out of the song that they’ve been singing. Caroline tries and then submerges. There is also this question does she commit suicide? Ok, well, plot-wise, no, obviously she doesn’t because she’s alive at the end of the play, she’s not in a ghost town, she’s not in heaven. But spiritually, of course, she does. She submerges in grounds beneath the sea level, and her desires and her wants because that’s what’s required. And that’s the tragedy. It came out of this coin. A coin being dropped, the smallest of things, and the relationship of something so intimate between an adult and a child is complicated by money and circumstance, in a country that’s nothing to do and everything to do with that. So, it was such a tall order musically how to make sense of it all and not just to create a big hodgepodge. Things had intentionality.

AB: What about the musical styles for the objects like—at least for me—the laundry machine sounds like Aretha Franklin, and the Motown girl group for the radio, and James Brown for the
dryer? Was that something that you thought of? The libretto doesn’t specify these styles or how they should sing. Your music does.

JT: We were going after that kind of cheap joint feel that they would be doing, like the nefarious guy with the Jerry curls who played the dryer; and the three girls were the kind of girl group, not The Supremes, but more homegrown. They were just out of the woodwork everywhere. In fact, Ramona Keller’s mother was in one of the first girl groups, and so we got a lot of her. She was in it when she was twelve, they cut a record, and she wrote songs for lunch hour at school. That’s where that came from.

AB: So it was something that you thought of?

JT: I don’t know if it was. There were so many artists back there who I love and I’ve listened to, so eventually it’s not one. I mean, Etta James definitely was in my mind for Caroline because of her guttural, her unbelievably courageous voice, and the low register. And the fight, I mean, she has just a fight in her. I think I wasn’t thinking of Aretha for the washing machine because she’s too cool, she’s optimism. You know, the washing machine does not sound as much church as Aretha does.

AB: I’m sure you and Tony talked a lot about dramatic purpose for a song. What do you think that you as a composer can bring to the dramatic purpose of a song when the plot is organized by just songs? His words and his dialogues are so strong, how do you think a composer can bring purpose to a song that adds to the words?

JT: Well, that’s the job! I think that the best theatrical composers are great dramaturges. They understand what the event is, they understand what and where the conflict is and isn’t, and there’s a willingness to be wrong. It’s analysis, analysis, analysis, and suddenly, oh, an idea! Then, analysis, event, plot, story, narrative, character, release, the rhythm, inevitability, all of those things that are bouncing around each other. But mostly, I’m interested in what a song does, what it accomplishes, not what characters are feeling. Then, what they want, how the wanting of a character is going to appear on stage, because they want to get something. And then they have feelings about getting it or not getting it. I think that to realize these layers is confusing for a lot of people when characters come in and sing all the time. It’s not that it’s not viable, it is, but my approach is to first ask of all places and why, why are they singing? If it’s just a release for the audience, because they’ve had so much, and they need some idiotic space to sit down and have a twizzler, great! Then I’m really clear about that. If they need a break, their ears need break, otherwise it’s pound, pound, pound. Before moving forward with the plot, they need a break. It’s like a cigarette break. But that has to be clear to me.

AB: So this is an idiotic space?

JT: Well, Fun Home’s commercial, for instance, when the kids sing the commercial, you don’t have to listen to it, you can just be with it. There’s no big new information. It’s not deep. And they’re getting storied a little bit, but you’re seeing that they’re comfortable, they’re completely comfortable in the world of a funeral home. You’re getting all of the ideas, you’re understanding that is nothing to them: they’re talking about aneurism hooks and embalming, and all of that
stuff. They’ve grown up with this, there’s not even a problem there. That’s really light information, mostly it’s about the beat and watch these kids have fun. Done! Four minute, done! Over! That’s it! Applause, and take a breath, and then you’re ready, just the state of readiness. It’s a conversation with the audience and understand that, well, if you want them to come onboard or not. And they want to go on the ride, but if they’re cycling and it’s all uphill all night, they’re not going to get onboard; they can’t do it. They need level, go down, go back up. So, I think that it’s understanding we’re not just doing it in a vacuum, we’re doing it for our final scene partners, which is the audience. We bounce back and forth. The musical doesn’t really exist until they come in. Of course, it’s written, but it doesn’t exist in time and space. So, there are so many variables in a musical and that’s why they’re so flexible, I think, to expand a book to be all sung.

AB: Are there differences between composing a song for a book musical and a song for an all-sung musical?

JT: It’s all dramatic songwriting, not pop or art song. Pop songs don’t need context. I listen to Taylor Swift’s “Shake It Off,” and I’m on my bike, I’m totally good! I mean, I don’t need any information before or after. Musical theater is in context. So if I have someone and they’re at a grave, and they start singing that song, it’s like completely different prism which to see it and listen to it. So to me it is all about laying that down, what George Wolf calls the “spinal column,” which you lay out and then things get structured.

AB: And what if you’re composing a song that goes into a musical continuum that you’re building?

JT: Well, as a dramatic composer, I think it is our job to create a building or a design that’s super clear, foundation, it goes like this. It’s not just, “Hmm, I’m guessing.” Of course you guess all the time, like in medicine, but I think it comes from a place of knowledge, as opposed to, “What if we…?” It comes from a place like that, from the basic thing you’re building the foundation from, either a book, a script, or other songs. And then you say, “This song needs to…” and then maybe you need that song ten songs later because there’s a lot of guess working in, but you know what you’re trying to get that song to do.

AB: Is it true that Caroline’s “Lot’s Wife” was very challenging for you and Tony?

JT: Yes, very challenging! Have you seen that documentary Show Business?¹

AB: No, I haven’t found a copy of the DVD yet.

JT: It will answer a lot of those questions. And you will see the visuals. Dori got a lot of things I would never now put on tape. Ever! A lot of private little moments. But it will be very helpful to you.

¹ Show Business: The Road to Broadway is a 2007 documentary directed by Dori Berinstein that provides a behind-the-scene look in the making of four Broadway musicals from the 2003–2004 season: Avenue Q, Caroline, or Change, Taboo, and Wicked.
AB: It was in a review of this documentary that I learned that composing that number was challenging to you.

JT: It really goes inside the making of that piece because we were really in it when she was filming.

AB: I’ve read a lot of reviews of your works. What do you think of the word pastiche being attributed to your score, especially for Caroline, what is your opinion about that?

JT: Usually, they’re using it in a negative way. It interested me, I don’t think that it interests me now. I was working something out. I don’t know! I mean, I really don’t know. It’s collage? Pastiche? Collage is made of found materials, and I don’t think people do it negatively. It interests me! And so when people threw me a lot of shade for that, I think it was out of ignorance. A lot of musical criticism is ignorance. Very frustrating! I ignore it now. If you’re not going to say something to teach me…Taylor Swift, shake it off, and I don’t give a fuck.

AB: [laughs] Shake it off, yeah!

JT: Right? I think when you’re working with found objects or found styles and you’re trying to do something with it, the more interesting question is why you’re doing it. What is she after? As opposed to “she’s just a woman working in pastiche,” which I think is what was really frustrating for me because I’d just thought, “This is where I am in my career; for some reason I will break out of it at some point,” which I have, but it was really discounted!

AB: I saw the original production of Caroline at the Public Library’s Theater on Tape, and they have the 2003 Off-Broadway version. I saw some differences from the Broadway version. Do you remember why and how the changes were made?

JT: I don’t remember!

AB: One difference that struck me was the last number, “Emmie’s Dream.” It was very different!

JT: Oh, yes, I hated it!

AB: But then towards the end it gets similar to what it is in the Broadway version.

JT: Right!

AB: Do you remember why the changes were made?

JT: Oh, it didn’t work. I just remember thinking that it doesn’t work. The statue coming out at first, it was just a big mess. It was a big mess. We didn't spend enough time on that, and then when we got to the end, we really saw her [Emmie] taking over, and it was really important that she’d come out in a Shakespearian way and said, “We have just one more thing, and then you can go home.” It was me, I did it! And that was the event. It is not the surprise, I mean, some people were surprised, but it’s really the expectation: you know where that girl is coming from,
her roots just like the Gulf of Mexico, from her mother’s fight; her mother’s sturdiness is in her veins, and she’s going to go and she claims that, “I’m the daughter of a maid.” She turns shame into ownership. And she claims it, “That’s right, I’m from a trailer park, and I have ideas, and I know where I’m from. And I know where I’m going. And I know why.” So we troubled the whole journey so that the daughter could sing this at the end.

AB: I like the way it is now, the way she refers to the court house downtown and the changes that are happening there, it’s seems stronger than what it was Off-Broadway.

JT: Absolutely! We just had to spend more time on it. We ran out of time downtown.

AB: Is it a similar idea with the ending of the first act?

JT: Right, exactly!

AB: I noticed that the kids started singing and getting away, making room for Caroline to come to the stage. Now it seems like a bigger finale.

JT: We had to get to something behind, some grasp because there wasn’t any. We just didn’t find it downtown. It was very hard to develop because you have previews.

AB: Was the statue ever live on the stage?

JY: Oh, yes! It was so bad! He was like [imitates the statue dragging itself to the stage] oh, oh, oh…

AB: Did it ever sing?

JT: Yes, it sang, it was weird, this head [she does some throat sounds].

AB: I saw in an old playbill that some actor played the statue.

JT: Bad, it was really bad! And the actor was so good, but it was b-a-d, bad!

AB: Why is the clarinet Stuart’s instrument?

JT: Well, Tony’s father was a clarinetist.

AB: Oh, ok! And why did you choose Mozart’s Clarinet Concerto in A? Why Mozart?

JT: He loved it! I loved Tony’s dad! I loved, loved, loved, loved, him! He was a great musician and a great conductor. His mother was a bassoonist, but she died a while ago. I talked to his dad many times and asked, “Tell me your favorite pieces and why.” He was like, “This and this,” and it was really important for me to incorporate them, so that’s really why.
AB: Can you talk a little about the difference, if there is any, between musicals and opera. Do you think that there is a difference between composing for operatic voice as opposed to musical theater?

JT: Of course!

AB: Can you talk a little bit about the differences?

JT: Well, the tessitura alone! I’m writing my third opera now, and the forms themselves, there is a hybridity happening, so that’s that. But the answer is much harder to answer. I like that it’s hard to answer. I think the range of their voices and the training itself of opera singers allow them to sing without augmentation, it’s really important! But just the things that you can do, the sheer range of a soprano and what she can express up there, even if it’s really difficult to understand because of high-pitched vowel sounds. But you can do that in an opera. In musical theater, when you must hear it, you must hear it on the first passage. Exposition is important, and there’s a reason why the range is shorter, not just because of training. I need a listener to get everything not on three or four listenings, but they need to come and hear everything on one, with no supertitles.

AB: Barbra Streisand can sing “Don’t Rain on My Parade,” but can she sing an aria by Mozart? There’s something there.

JT: Right! But also, there was that time when Aretha Franklin did…was it Norma? She sang, what was it? One of the tenors [Luciano Pavarotti] backed out, and she didn’t change a key and sang it [“Nessun Dorma” from Puccini’s Turando]. And it catapulted other similar performances. So, part of it is the delivery system. I just don’t think that it’s such an easy answer. There are not as things, there’s so much cross talk now between forms, I think it’s just not easy to answer that anymore. I think there was a time when it was super easy to answer.

AB: How many of the actors in Caroline, or Change did you have in mind when you wrote the music?

JT: Almost all of them. I first wrote only the first act, and then we got almost everyone for our workshop, we did just a really quick little workshop back in the day. And almost all of them went all the way through, so I started writing right for them.

AB: Can you talk about the process of writing with the actor in mind? I believe this takes a lot of listening from your part.

JT: Well, when I first work with people, I play the piano. And then I write on them. I did it in front all of them, all over the place. I’d be up to them and I would say, “Sing, o.k., when she does this, can you…” and then my assistant would be right by, so I can paint on them. And that’s how it breathes, so it’s just not me thinking about it in my world. No, you get in the room, you really get to hear around them a lot.
AB: Tony gave you a, let’s say, complete libretto. But I’d think that you altered some of the lyrics as you wrote the music?

JT: A ton, a ton, a ton, a ton, a ton.

AB: To the point that what they’re singing are words that you wrote?

JT: Every once in a while, I do a lot of dummy words for them. But I just say, “This doesn’t play elegantly, it doesn’t open vowel, it’s hard.” You don’t want to say “first” [she emphasizes the r], “first here” [she emphasizes the t] because the r is pitch and then you have an “s” and a “t”. I mean, hear how it sings. You don’t want that. We want something else. So there’s such a back and forth, a back and forth, as opposed to ttt [she emphasizes the letter t]. I’ve never just set something to music without altering some of the words. It has to be, to me, that beautiful back and forth of two writers saying, “let me give you,” “alright, let me change that so that…,” “o.k., oh, edit that,” “oh, is that…” and then suddenly, it inextricably ties.

AB: When you were composing Caroline, did you think to yourself of another musical theater composer or musical theater piece that sounded, or perhaps not sounded, but had similar structure?

JT: Gospel at Colonus. I love that piece. Do you know it?

AB: Actually, I don’t know it.

JT: You will love it! It’s very special! A piece that should be done more. It’s impressive. I’m not going to remember the composer’s name [Bob Telson]. But Morgan Freeman was in it. It was neat, in the ’80s. Beautiful! Beautiful!

AB: I’ll have to look that up.

JT: Ah, Janacek for sure, he’s my favorite opera composer. I love him because of the way he follows speech. I just love him! Also another influence, I wrote music for a long, long time because I was on a musicology route, not like you, but I produced world music in my twenties and so I got to know from the inside out, from being in sessions with all of those players, just the way that it was expressed. All over the world, it was incredibly helpful. Everything is such a mushy in my brain now, it’s so synthesized, it’s hard to take it apart if I looked anyone, anything else. Tony is just a great musician, such a vast knowledge of classical music, opera world, and musical theater. I mean, he’s an amazing man. And so we were just trying to keep up with each other.

AB: I did not know he was a musician!

JT: Oh, he’s extraordinary! He’s an extraordinary person! He knows so many things because of his parents. His parents met, I think, at Juilliard. His father was a clarinetist, his mother was a bassoonist. His father was a beautiful conductor, and then they moved the family down to Lake Charles, Louisiana, where he for years and years was the conductor of the symphony there. Tony
went to school there. You know, his brother Eric is the first horn player in Vienna. It’s a huge musical family.

AB: What about musical theater composers in general that you admire, that you consider an influence?

JT: Well, Sondheim, for sure! Anything Sondheim does. He’s my conduit composer because he knows his stuff! He just does! He knows classical music, he understands counterpoint, he understands lyric drive, sonic drive, he’s a great teacher, he’s a complicated person, he writes about complicated people. I just love him as a person. I love Bill Finn! We both went to the same college. I just love that they want to include the complications of being alive. I love Lin-Manuel. I think Lin-Manuel Miranda is a fantastic writer. I like Michael Freedman and Tom Oldham very much, so I’m hearing all of their work. David Malloy is really interesting to me! And there’s not a lot of women who I hear, but there’s a generation like Carmel Dean, Erica Milazzo, whom I like a lot. Tonya Leon, I love, love, love, love her work! I try to listen to as much as I can. I don’t go to a lot of musicals! I don’t. It’s too much! I went to see *The Visit*, which I loved a lot.

AB: Have you seen *Caroline* done recently?

JT: I’ve seen it in a high school here in New York. It was unbelievable! I mean, not every element, the radio basically was singing in, I don’t know, fifths all night, which was so Gregorian! Gregorian Supremes. But a young woman, a seventeen-year-old who sang Caroline was astonishing! I could not believe it! She bowled me over. And we met, and I brought her to see *Fun Home*.

AB: I’m sure she was thrilled, as I am for having met you in person. Thank you so much for your time!

JT: Thank you! It’s such a pleasure to meet someone so smart!

AB: Thank you!

JT: Thank you! We need your work! Very few have written about *Caroline*. John Rockwell wrote a piece about *Caroline*, and that’s the only thing that I just thought, “Well, he understands it,” and, well, he’s a musician. He writes about music like Alex Ross. I just read the memoir of Oliver Sacks, which I can’t recommend enough, it’s so beautiful! And I understand that it’s hard to write about certain things, that’s why Atul Gawande, Oliver Sacks, they write about psychiatry or psychotic conditions or medical conditions in a way that makes it so easy, it comes alive. The ability, which I don’t have to write about music and to bring it and make it alive, is great. We need what you’re doing! It’s constructive criticism, and I’m interested in it because of the word “construct.”