

Musical Theatre in America

Richard Davidson

INTRODUCTION

We all have a soundtrack to our lives. It's filled with special songs that serve as mnemonic devices, exclamations of love, and sweet escapes. In his succinct and wonderfully eloquent fashion, Sir George Martin reminds us that music "helps us remember and it consoles us when we want to forget. In fact, it's difficult to imagine an existence without music." Aside from musicians, I cannot think of a group that makes music such an integral part of their lives as do adolescents. The well-crafted lyric melded with an accessible tune often creates powerful emotions, which touch a listener in a profoundly personal way. An artist's song somehow becomes "ours" or "mine." While many of us lose this intimate connection to music as we grow older, it is an integral part of adolescence.

In a similar manner, creativity and self-expression are important to children of all ages. Likewise, aside from artists, this need for self-expression often wanes with age. To see just how important creativity is in our students' lives, all we have to do is look at children drawing while they should be doing their class work, folding origami during their "free time," and dancing and singing in the hallways between classes. In Martin's *Rhythm of Life*, Bobby McFerrin could be speaking for the children in my classes when he says, "I think it's a primal need, a food ... that's simply there for us. And we *must* sing, we *must* play, we *must* dance, or we die."

I plan on capitalizing on McFerrin's "primal need" and creating, with my students, an ethnic musical. The overall learning potential in such a project is phenomenal. Students will explore the extensive history of musical theatre in the United States and analyze and interpret the figurative language of poetry and song, while acquiring the technical and performance skills of theatre.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Native American Ritual

European-style musical theatre has a long and varied history in America. But long before Europeans came to America, Native Americans had established a unique style of ritual musical performance that was highly symbolic and complex. Richard Crawford points to the first-person accounts of French priests, traders and Spanish conquistadors who experienced, and sometimes participated in, Native healings, peace pipe ceremonies and ritual blessings. One particular healing ceremony that Crawford describes, performed on a Jesuit priest in 1634, has all the trappings of a musical spectacle: special costumes, choreography, music, astounding (and at times frightening) vocalization, and

improvisation based upon an unwritten script. In these ceremonies, there seems to be no little or no distinction between what we would refer to as the performers and audience, with everyone in attendance joining in the singing, drumming and dancing in order to assist in the healing process.

Similarly, the Calumet, or peace pipe, ceremony was one in which there was no “audience,” per se. During the ceremony, the precise movement of the dancers was determined by the tempo of the singers, and a mock battle was fought in time to the slow beat of a drum. One contemporary account states that the dancing was suitable for “a very fine Entry of a Ballet in France.” Another French chronicler of the Calumet ceremony describes the pipe dancing, where each person in turn takes the pipe and dances with it, to the cadence of the songs. The lead dancer displays the pipe, turning around so all can see it, while executing a wide variety of pipe movements and dance steps. Crawford stresses the strong narrative quality of the dance, another essential element of theatre.

The Chickasaw house-blessing ceremony is also filled with music, dance and symbolism. A description of one such ceremony, told by a trader, details the movement, singing and even the direction the shaman faced during the blessing. The shaman began the ritual bent halfway over, with arms spread out to the north and south for a minute or more. Suddenly standing straight up, and glancing fearfully from the southwest to the north, he began to gutturally sing short phrases, changing the accent and pitch as the phrases were repeated. From time to time, he looked upward, with his neck contorted backward. In this ceremony, which lasted about 15 minutes, the shaman was humbly asking the Great Spirit to protect the trader’s home from any “evil spirits of the north, south, east or west.” The trader did not understand the symbolism, or indeed the meaning, of the ritual until the shaman explained them to him.

Another blessing was performed prior to beginning trade transactions. Crawford relates the story of William Beresford, whose diary details tales of trade and travel near present-day Sitka, Alaska. In the late 1700s, Beresford transcribed a Native trading song, specifying solo vocal parts for the leader. He describes the leader, who wore a ceremonial robe and shook a stick rattle that had bird beaks and berries dangling from it. The leader began each of the many stanzas and then the rest of the tribe joined in, harmonizing their separate part on top of his. This ritual combination of music, voice and dance continued for half an hour, accompanied by clapping and keeping time with paddles. As the priest healed by the Huron tribe said, “all their religion consists mainly of singing.”

Ballad Opera and Olios

As early as 1732, European-style musical theatre was being performed in the American colonies. One of the first such productions was the English import *The Beggar’s Opera*. Daniel Kingman tells of the first Colonial theatre, built in 1716 in Williamsburg, Virginia, and the use of musicians in the playhouse from “the very beginning.” He explains that nearly all the productions were, loosely speaking, musicals. Even such

works as Shakespeare “were usually presented with interpolated songs, dances, and incidental music.” Though another ballad opera, *Flora, or the Hob in the Hole*, had been performed in Charleston, South Carolina, a few years prior to *The Beggar’s Opera*, it’s generally accepted that the 1746 production of *The Beggar’s Opera* introduced America to musicals. Julian Mates points out that it was the imported English ballad operas and broadsides that dominated the stage through Colonial and Federal times. It was not until the days of Jacksonian expansion that American music truly came into its own.

In the eighteenth century, the distinction between light and serious music became blurred and both historical and literary sources were often used as a basis for musicals and ballad operas. The simple beauty of a ballad opera is the use of popular tunes as a basis for a song cycle. The reasoning is that if you change the lyrics to a recognizable, well-liked song, you are almost assured to have a hit song. It made good business sense to take an already popular tune and utilize it for more entertainment and profit. Ballad opera also incorporated a touch of *commedia dell’ arte*, with stock characters, convoluted subplots and satirization of the upper class. While the ballad opera had its origin in England and fell out of favor there within a couple of decades, its popularity continued in America for quite some time.

As the role of the individual composer became more important, in the second half of the eighteenth century, comic opera began to replace ballad opera as a theatre mainstay. Here, the music is more complex and more integral to the plot. A musical style known as pastiche, or pasticcio, evolved as a sort of intermediate stage between the two. As the name implies, the tunes here were often “borrowed” as they were in ballad opera, the difference being that the songs were more sophisticated and more closely related to the storyline than in ballad opera. In comic opera, a single composer composes music for a specific play. Still, many of these originated in England, although there were a considerable number of American composers and lyricists working with very American subjects. Two of the first to successfully do so were lyricist James Nelson Barker and composer John Bray, with their adaptation of the Pocahontas and John Smith love story. Kingman points out that this production reversed the trend, with *The Indian Princess* becoming the first musical play to cross the Atlantic the *other* way and become a (pirated) success on the London stage.

The spirit of *commedia dell’ arte* survived in pantomime, which included musical accompaniment written for stage movement and speech. Here, stock characters such as Harlequin and Columbine improvised, as well as performed set pieces to, “action music.” The use of wordless music, or melodrama, was another stage of a trend seen in *The Indian Princess*, and continuing into the silent film days. Melodrama was evident in the circus, to enhance the excitement of the performances, as well as in *olios*. *Olios* were rather hodge-podge affairs, featuring recitations, duets, musical burlesque, and instrumentals. Basically variety shows, *olios* helped usher in minstrel shows and revues, as well as serving as an early template for vaudeville’s success.

Blackface Minstrelsy

The blackface minstrel show, while an indigenous American musical form, had its roots in foreign soil. At the heart of minstrelsy was human fascination with what has now become known as “the other.” Racial stereotypes were nothing new in theatre, with Irish and Scottish characters being well represented on the American stage. Yet Crawford claims that neither institutionalized racism nor the appropriation of black artistry can fully explain the enormous significance of minstrelsy in its day. Rather, it was often the social satire presented by blackface minstrels that appealed to white audiences. The disparity between real and perceived social and political power was apparent when blackface performers alternately appeared to be “profoundly stupid at one moment and cunning and wily the next” in order to circumvent the white man’s plans. Within the masked safety of blacking up, actors discovered their ability to shed convention and behave in ways completely inappropriate in any other circumstance. Crawford writes of “near demonic” performances “which sought to overwhelm audiences with sheer anarchic energy.” He says that, in their affront to civilized norms, blackface minstrels seem to have much in common with iconoclastic rock-and-roll musicians.

It is this combination, says Crawford – social commentary, the black mask and a performance filled with unconventional passion – that imbued minstrelsy with multilayered depth and appeal. Whites were able to examine their personal perceptions and misconceptions of African Americans, while at the same time gaining insight into their own condition. Clowns, whether in white face or black face, often have hard truths to teach under the guise of humor. By tapping into stereotypes, minstrels were showing the inherent foibles of Everyman. The black face performer could be devious, lazy or licentious, but then again, so could we all.

African American slaves had been denied the use of drums, but they were allowed the use of other instruments, and chief among them was the fiddle. Contemporary accounts expound upon the musical prowess of African American musicians, especially fiddlers. David Ewen tells of early steamboats bringing goods and African American music northward on the Mississippi and the fascination this “strange music” held on passengers from the North. Upon their return home, these passengers often tried to recreate these tunes vocally or on the piano or harmonium. A New York newspaper praised those composers who were writing in a style that approximated “the beautiful melodies of the south.” The stage was being set for the advent of the minstrel show.

Ewen is one of many who give credit to a theatrical performer called “Daddy” Rice for originating minstrel shows. In 1828, Thomas Dartmouth Rice was appearing in a theatre in Baltimore, and behind this venue was a stable owned by a man named Jim Crow. Crow had a slave who had, as was often the custom, taken his name. This Jim Crow was an old, misshapen, crippled man who moved with great effort and gyrations. Rice saw this man shuffling about one afternoon, singing to himself what must surely have been the original version of “Jump Jim Crow.” The potential for commercial exploitation was an epiphany for “Daddy” Rice and he incorporated the movement, song

and (it is said) clothing of the old man into his next performance. Rice's impersonation was an instant success, as was his version of "Jump Jim Crow." The tune spawned many parodies and African American characters became a part of innumerable performers' acts. The year 1833 saw "Jump Jim Crow" being sung during the intermission at a theatre in New York. The stereotypical character of Jim Crow, along with Zip Coon, survived well into the twentieth century.

Crawford explains the difference between the Jim Crow and Zip Coon characters as being chiefly the difference between a "bumptious Southern hand" and a foppishly stylish urbanite, respectively. Both were unabashed braggarts, and despite Zip Coon's seeming sophistication, both were usually portrayed as ignorant fools whose hilarious shenanigans both entertained and titillated audiences. Crawford draws another parallel between black face minstrels and rock-and-rollers when it comes to overt sexuality in performance. Specifically, he refers to the cover of the sheet music to "Coal Black Rose," where Sambo sings, "Lubly Rosa, Sambo cum / Don't you hear de Banjo—tum, tum, tum," while holding the neck of the banjo in a suggestive way that "anticipates the phallic implications of rock-and-roll" guitarists.

The minstrel show got a shot in the arm, strangely enough, as a result of the 1842 economic depression. Theatres went dark and many performers were out of work. Seeking safety in numbers, solo acts often banded together in minstrel troupes. Kingman describes these traveling minstrel shows as loud, percussive affairs, utilizing banjo, fiddle, bones, and tambourine, and Ewen cites Dan Emmett as the man who hit upon this particular instrumentation. Emmett, the son of a blacksmith, had a bad case of wanderlust, and just enough musical knowledge to enlist in the army as a piper. This did not last, as he was underage, and his next job was as a circus drummer. When he again felt the need for change, Emmett found his calling with a theatrical troupe headed up by "Daddy" Rice.

Ewen calls Daniel Emmett "the first great figure" and one of the most important composers in minstrelsy. He tells how, in 1843, three friends visited Emmett at the North American Hotel in New York, and began an impromptu jam session. Billy Whitlock and Emmett were playing banjo and fiddle, and when Frank Bower and Dick Pelham joined in, playing the bones and tambourine, the arrangement seemed to work perfectly. They decided to form a group, calling themselves The Virginia Minstrels, and Crawford reports that they immediately went across the street to the Bowery Circus and auditioned, getting their first engagement in the bargain. They were the original blackface minstrel company, and their instrumentation and performances were copied by many of the troupes that sprang up in their shadow. When performing, the Virginia Minstrels always set up onstage in a semicircle, with the rhythm players on either end and banjo and fiddle in the middle. Their show was divided into two parts, with the opening dealing with Northern urban life and the second half ending down in Dixie, often closing with a rousing plantation tune. Their songs often featured the call and response, syncopation and repetition so common in African American song.

Emmett and Brower met during Emmett's days traveling in the circus, and in 1842 they performed together in blackface at various venues in New York. Brower was a song and dance man as well as a bones player, and his talents meshed well with Emmett's. Whitlock was a blackface performer who learned to play the banjo from Joel Sweeney, the first known white banjo player, who had learned the instrument from a slave on his father's farm. Pelham and Brower were both basically dancers, and Brower is said to have learned how to dance by imitating old African American slaves.

Crawford points to the Virginia Minstrels' strange instrumentation as proof that formal study could not provide the skills needed for minstrelsy. The violin was the only European instrument in their minstrel band, and the instrument had a double life as a folk instrument. Known in the British Isles and America as a fiddle, the bowing techniques of a fiddler produced a courser, less fluid sound than that of a violinist. Crawford acknowledges that African Americans had been fiddling before minstrel shows, but says that it's unknown what affect their style of playing had on blackface minstrels. The banjo was an African instrument, strung with catgut and much lower pitched than the modern banjo. There are no written records of white banjo players until Joel Sweeney began to learn the instrument in the late 1820s. Crawford believes that the portability of bones and tambourine speaks to the troupe's emphasis of rhythm and dance over melody and harmony. Pelham and Brower, as Mr. Tambo and Mr. Bones, often danced about as they played, which helped to establish and accentuate the rhythm. Honing their skills as musicians and dancers while perfecting their banter with audiences, these four young men toured the east coast and British Isles throughout the 1840s.

Dan Emmett is best remembered today as the composer of "Dixie," one of the most popular songs of the nineteenth century. However, Ewen points out that it was one of his earliest songs, "Old Dan Tucker," that became one of the most famous minstrel show tunes of its day. The tune itself had a life of its own, being utilized as the melody for two protest songs. Abolitionists and Albany, New York "antirent" protesters both appropriated the tune to serve their respective causes. In an historical footnote, the "antirent" movement was a dispute against feudal landlords on both banks of the Hudson that involved hundreds of tenants dressed as Indians, blowing horns and singing their protest song. The tenants eventually won out, their leases were legally voided and this feudal system was abolished.

It was an impresario and blackface performer named E.P. Christy that molded minstrel shows into their final form. Born in Philadelphia, Christy lived in New Orleans as a young man, and later claimed to have spent his time there studying the music, speech and mannerisms of African Americans. In the 1830s he perfected his blackface routine as a traveling entertainer. This led him to found his own troupe, the Christy Minstrels, in Buffalo, New York. The company toured for several years before opening in New York in 1846. There, charging 25 cents for adults and half that for children, the Christy Minstrels became the most successful minstrel company in the United States. The troupe

settled into New York's Mechanics' Hall for seven and a half years, for a phenomenal run just shy of 2,800 performances. Touring in England, Christy's troupe instilled there, in Ewen's words, a "genuine vogue" for minstrel shows.

Christy's performances were three-part affairs, beginning with a selection of songs that often featured Zip Coon or a similarly foppish Northern character. Next would come an olio, with a bit of something for everyone, and they ended the same way Emmett's Virginia Minstrels finished their shows, back in Dixie. But this was a big burlesque finish, fleshed out with a full band. Christy's addition of the mini variety show in the middle of his program served as more than transition, it helped to keep the momentum going as well as spotlighted the specific skills and appeal of individual troupe members. Another aspect of the Christy Minstrels that set them apart from most minstrel troupes was the way they incorporated virtually all forms of popular songs in their shows. Crawford mentions that even operatic numbers such as Bellini's "Phantom Chorus" became a part of the company's repertoire. Such sophistication was a far cry from the Virginia Minstrels' bones, tambourine, banjo and fiddle arrangements, and pointed the direction minstrelsy was headed.

At the time that the Christy Minstrels began to change the face of minstrelsy, Stephen C. Foster began to compose songs. With strong melodic appeal and the ability to "bear up well under constant repetition," Foster's songs mirror the change in minstrel music between 1843 and 1850. Crawford goes on to say that songs like Dan Emmett's "Old Dan Tucker," rough, driven and muscular, were falling out of fashion, though they were by no means forgotten. The expanded repertory of troupes such as the Christy Minstrels cultivated audiences with more eclectic musical appetites and the wild performances of Emmett and his ilk were falling out of favor. This led up to the time Foster and Christy became, in Crawford's words, "collaborators of a sort in 1850."

By 1848, Stephen Foster's songs were gaining enough popularity on the minstrel stage to convince him to embark upon a full-time career as a songwriter. Reasoning that the best way to sell sheet music (the chief source of income for songwriters in those days) was to have it performed onstage by a popular company such as the Christy Minstrels, Foster made an agreement with Christy, giving his Christy Minstrels an exclusive first-performance option on his new songs. This link-up was mutually beneficial; Foster was now associated with the most successful minstrel troupe and Christy had made it to the number one spot through incorporating Foster's earlier hits, "Oh! Susanna" and "Old Uncle Ned."

1851 saw Foster giving Christy the rights to "Old Folks at Home," an immensely popular song. Fearing, for a time, that he would limit his wider popular appeal through association with minstrel songs, Foster chose to publicly distance himself from them. He realized the mistake he made and later wrote to Christy in order to reclaim his song, but Christy refused to relinquish ownership. Foster wrote more long-lasting popular songs than any nineteenth century American songwriter. Dan Emmett's songwriting and

enduring popularity pale in comparison to Stephen Foster's. Foster's "Oh! Susanna," "Nelly Bly," "Camptown Races," "My Old Kentucky Home," and "Old Folks at Home" remain mainstays of American music to this day.

After the Civil War, minstrel shows' popularity faded, but as Kingman mentions, more black performers became involved in them. It thus became a type of training ground for blues artists such as W.C. Handy and "Ma" Rainey and jazz musicians such as Jelly Roll Morton and Lester Young. African American minstrel troupes toured the United States and England up through the turn of the twentieth century. Around this same time, things began to change, and black entertainers such as Bert Williams and George Walker were instrumental in bringing a new level of dignity to black characters on the stage. Eventually performing in *In Dahomey* (1902) and *In Bandana Land* (1907), Williams and Walker were in the forefront of black shows performed by black entertainers at the turn of the century. Yet, as late as 1921's *Shuffle Along*, what Kingman calls "the shadow of minstrelsy" still was evident in some of these shows.

Vaudeville and Tin Pan Alley

The birth of vaudeville owes much to the burlesque, farce, extravaganza, and satire of minstrelsy, as does *The Black Crook*, which is said by many to have been the genesis of true musical theatre in America. Kingman believes that *The Black Crook* merely appropriated concepts already in use at the time and combined them in order to titillate and entertain. The enormous popular and financial success of *The Black Crook* bred further theatrical experimentation and assimilation. Tony Pastor, the "father" of vaudeville, borrowed from minstrel shows, olios, saloons, English music halls, and circuses and came up with shows the whole family could attend. Twenty years later, these acts were being booked all over the United States.

It was Gilbert and Sullivan who showed the face of musical theatre to come. With their witty lyrics and clever, "memorable tunes that never get in the way," they became, and remained, popular on both sides of the Atlantic. They raised the bar to new heights, and Anglicized musical theatre in such a way that their influence remains strong. The phenomenal phrasing of their patter songs is still impressive by today's standards. It would be a generation before American musical theatre had such fine fare to offer, though Harrigan and Hart were their contemporaries. Hart and Harrigan plays were among the first to use New York as a backdrop for musical theatre, and it was their blend of song and story with the mixed ethnicity of the city that struck a chord with theatergoers. Of course, the enduring popularity of New York for a play's setting is evidenced by *Rent* and much of "Doc" Simon's work.

It was George M. Cohan's music that vitalized American theatre. He could write razzle-dazzle show tunes, and patriotic anthems such as "Over There" and "Yankee Doodle Boy." *The Encyclopedia of the Musical Theatre* explains that Cohan's musical career began early, since he was born into a vaudeville family. Billed as the Four Cohans,

he performed with his sister and parents. As a young man, he wrote and starred in *The Governor's Son* with his wife, Ethel Levy, and the rest of his family. They toured for two seasons on the success of this show. His other hits were *Running for Office*, *Little Johnny Jones*, *The Yankee Doodle Boy* and *Give My Regards to Broadway*. The public's tastes changed while Cohan did not, and his musical career ended shortly after World War I.

In 1927, *Show Boat* hit Broadway. Kingman lists musical theatre giants such as Jerome Kern, Kurt Weil, George Gershwin, Cole Porter, Irving Berlin, Richard Roger, and Oscar Hammerstein II, who dominated the stage and screen after *Show Boat* for thirty years. One of the enduring qualities of this work is the fully fleshed characters, dealing with the wonder and tragedy of everyday life. The lyrical content and music is first-rate, but it is the believability of the characters that keep an audience interested. The exquisite melding of lyric and music is captivating, but of little use if the audience doesn't care about the characters. If a character starts singing for no apparent reason, the audience may lose interest or "the willing suspension of disbelief."

David Ewen tells of Jerome Kern's career in show business, beginning as a song-plugger and Broadway rehearsal pianist around the turn of the twentieth century. He soon began to provide additional songs for musicals, mostly European operettas that were being adapted for the New York stage. Kern became so prolific that by the beginning of World War I he had written over one hundred songs that had been interpolated into about thirty musicals. He apprenticed in London in 1906 and had a handful of songs published and performed on the London stage, with P.G. Wodehouse supplying lyrics. While Kern's initial scores were failures, he was successful with interpolated songs. He was admired, and sometimes imitated, by his peers, including George Gershwin.

The years between 1915 and 1918 found Kern composing for New York's Princess Theatre, an intimate, 300-seat venue with a small orchestra of about a dozen musicians. Here, with librettist Guy Bolton, Kern forged a sophisticated new style of musical, where the song and story were more integrated than in the song-and-dance musicals and operettas then popular. His productions generally had one or two songs that became popular, even if the musicals weren't. One such example is the musical *Roberta* (1933) and the song "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes," which has been covered by modern crooners such as Bryan Ferry and Art Garfunkel.

By far the most important, successful and influential show of Kern's career is *Show Boat* (1927), when he teamed up with Oscar Hammerstein II. With songs such as "Ol' Man River" and "Can't Help Lovin' dat Man," Ewen says that the influence of *Show Boat* is "inestimable," specifically in the way that it raised the bar and forced Broadway composers to consider all aspects of production when they worked. *Show Boat* entered the New York Opera's repertory in 1954, a first for a musical. After 1939, Kern moved to and worked in Hollywood, devoting his energies to the silver screen and producing some of his best-known songs such as "The Last Time I Saw Paris," "Long Ago and Far Away," and "The Way You Look Tonight." After World War II, when European

operettas were replaced by American musical comedies as the most popular stage drama, Kern provided a link between the two. With his initial model being European operetta, Kern combined lyrical song within the demands of dramatic plot and motivation to create the American musical play.

Stephen Sondheim got his break on Broadway when he landed the job of lyricist for *West Side Story* (1957), working with another first-timer, librettist Arthur Laurents. *The Encyclopedia of the Musical Theatre* catalogues Sondheim's illustrious career, which continued to shine in *Gypsy* (1959) and *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (1962), the first show where he wrote both the lyrics and music. His next show, *Anyone Can Whistle* (1964) closed after only nine performances, but *Do I Hear a Waltz* (1965) was a hit. This would be the last show in which Sondheim would merely contribute lyrics; from then on, he wrote the music as well to all his shows. Complete control of the songs inspired Sondheim to new heights, and while not always commercially successful, he garnered a large following of music lovers that appreciated his intelligent lyrical and musical style. The British production of *Side by Side with Sondheim* was hugely popular with critics and theatre-goers. Stripped of many of their theatrical trappings, the songs stood up well on their own and helped to spread his work in a way that the London productions of previous shows had not been able to accomplish. The dark tale of *Sweeney Todd*, the strange fairy tale setting of *Into the Woods*, and phenomenal staging of *Sunday in the Park with George* have served to highlight Sondheim's unique voice and vision.

Composers have alternately embraced high and low art in musicals. Hummable pop songs seem right in place alongside the fugue "Cool" in *West Side Story*, for example. The soaring operatic ensemble singing of "Tonight" doesn't seem out of place, even compared to "America." Genres shift, depending on the mood, just as our own voices change with our moods. Since the heyday of American musicals, the business end of show business has been used for inspiration. *A Chorus Line*, *Gypsy*, *Funny Girl*, *Fosse*, and *Dreamgirls* all look to the stage for source material. *Godspell*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, and *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat* all look, with somewhat jaded, modern eyes, to the Bible for story lines, and *Rent* transforms the lives of squatters and street hustlers to theatre. Fairy tales and legends have supplied inspiration for musical theatre, and it seems that there is little that cannot be utilized for the musical muse.

POETRY AND SONG

For me, poetry and song are two sides of the same coin. George Martin says that "words communicate thoughts; music communicate feelings." The successful blend of lyric and music should then, communicate both thought and emotion. After the powerful Overture from *Jesus Christ Superstar*, Judas Iscariot tells of his latest revelation:

If you strip away the myth from the man
You will see where we all soon will be

A pain-filled voice frames this very human story of a savior, in a poignant song. The thoughts and feelings that Martin speaks of are evident. Later, when we last hear the voice of Judas, it is with a very modern sensibility that he speaks:

Why'd you chose such a backward time and such a strange land
If you'd come today you would have reached a whole nation
Israel in 4 B.C. had no mass communication

This is a frantic, frenetic delivery, full of fury and doubt. The fast-paced, guitar-driven instrumentation works well with the lyrical content. From the first through the last notes, music and lyric form a seamless whole. It doesn't matter which came first; the story is told in an intelligent, accessible manner. That is what good theatre is all about.

I want to listen to, explore, and explicate the lyrics of the music that my students enjoy. I want to show them examples of allusion, alliteration, assonance and imagery in "their" music. I want to share with my students the work of great poets, and to have them create poetry that we will later incorporate into lyrics. These could be as simple as rhyming couplets and limericks to fully realized villanelles and lyric poetry. I want them to realize that they are quite capable of creating good art! This will, I hope, show students that creating a musical is within their reach and that it's just necessary to put the pieces together, bit-by-bit.

In order to show my students how good lyrics are transformed into powerful songs, I plan to introduce them to song cycles and concept albums. Concept albums, popular in the 1970s, are based around a particular theme or storyline. The first one I'm aware of is *Dust Bowl Ballads*, by Woody Guthrie. This is Guthrie's 1962 self-described "song cycle" about the Great Depression, as seen first hand. Guthrie was not much of a tunesmith, but his poetry and lyrics are amazing. I plan on examining works with my students that have a literary basis, and comparing and contrasting the literary and musical theatre pieces. These could include Jules Verne's and Rick Wakeman's *Journey to the Center of the Earth* as well as H.G. Wells' and Jeff Wayne's *War of the Worlds*.

I would also like to delve with my students into *Animal Farm* and Pink Floyd's closely related, though much darker, *Animals*. I also want to explore with them Jon Anderson's *Olias of Sunhallow* and Small Faces' *Ogden's Nut Gone Flake*. Anderson's album is a tale of travel in search of a new home land, aboard a spaceship magically created and powered by music, and *Nut Gone Flake's* side two, whimsically narrated by Stanley Unwin, involves a journey in search of the "missing bits" of a waning moon. I want to illuminate my students with Duke Ellington's "*Black, Brown, and Beige Suite*," and Wendy Carlos' *Sonic Seasons*. The former deals with the African Diaspora, and the latter is an electronic interpretation of the four seasons.

I hope that by exploring these musical journeys with my students, they will be inspired to achieve new levels of personal and group growth. We need to have models that our children can grasp if we expect them to excel, and we must attempt to make learning a natural, enjoyable task. I can think of no better way to get students' attention than through music, and there are few things nearer to their hearts than music.

LESSON PLAN: VISUALIZATION EXERCISE

In this lesson, students will be led through a visualization exercise. One of the aspects of this exercise that my students love is that they will be allowed to close their eyes and put their heads on their desks for 10 to 20 minutes, depending on the length of the class and the "fidget factor." You will need one or two rain sticks, hopefully of different sizes. I use a small cactus rain stick and a large (four feet long) bamboo rain stick. After the students settle down, begin talking them through the exercise in a calm, soothing voice, while turning over one of the rain sticks at a time. If you're lucky the rain sticks will approximate the sound of waves washing back and forth on the beach, and the aural illusion will work.

I walk my students through a day at the beach, slowly helping my students paint a picture in their minds. I focus on all five senses, setting the stage by giving instructions and asking questions: You're at the beach. Where is this beach? Is this a real place you've been to, or a place that only exists in your imagination? Are you at Galveston or on a beach in Hawaii? Is this a special place where you go to be alone, or to spend time with your family or friends? Who is with you? How long have you been here? How long are you going to stay? Look out at the water. What color is it? Is the water blue or green or brown or clear? What color are the waves? Can you see the water change colors as the waves break? Can you hear the waves roll in [here you slowly turn over the large rain stick] and hear them roll back out [turn over the smaller rain stick] again? Can you see the tiny shells and pebbles dance to shore in the waves and then dance back out again? Can you smell the salt water? What else can you smell? Is there a grill going nearby? What's on the grill? Can you smell onions or burgers or fajitas sizzling? Look way down the beach to the left. What do you see? Are there others there or do you have the beach to yourself? Is there someone playing catch with his or her dog? Are there kids splashing in the water or building sand castles on the shore?

After concentrating on as many sensory questions you can come up with, I like to say that they will be leaving soon and ask how this makes them feel. I ask them to take it all in again before they leave, so that they can remember it when they get home. I then give an abbreviated walk-through, touching on the sights, sounds, smells, tastes and tactile sensations I have previously mentioned, ask them to raise their heads, get out paper and pen or pencil and write a short story about their day at the beach. I give extra credit for illustrations, but do not allow pictures to take the place of the writing assignments.

I have seen amazing work come out of this exercise, and often discovered what is important to my students. Some will tell poignant stories about special family vacations while others might relate tales of hanging out with hoochie mamas and pimp daddies, having a tight car and partying with their homies.

LESSON PLAN: PERSONIFICATION IN POETRY

In this lesson, students will explore personification and extended metaphors. You will need an anthology that contains T.S. Eliot's "Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," or if you are lucky enough to have one, a recording of the poet reading this work, such as can be found in *Poetry Speaks*. If you cannot provide enough copies of the poem for the students, an overhead or chalkboard/dry erase board can be used to allow the students to follow along with the reading. Don't panic at the thought of transcribing the entire poem, we are only going to concentrate on the stanza that speaks of the "cat-fog."

Either play or read the stanza aloud to the class, in your most poetic voice. With Eliot, it is often music of the words that one hears and not the meaning, so ask your students to listen to the *sound* of the poem when you read it the first time. Re-read it, this time asking the students to listen for the *meaning* the second time. Discuss the personification with the students, asking them what animal is represented by/represents the fog, steering them gently away from incorrect guesswork. Review extended metaphors and personification, and have the students share with each other similes and metaphors, all the while writing them down for all to see.

Have the students create their own extended metaphors, either as a classroom or homework assignment, which they can then share with each other, if they choose. Tell them to have fun with it, to be as outrageous as they would like!

LESSON PLAN: BE A POET

In this lesson, students will be able to express themselves in poetry. They will have a chance to examine aspects of poetry and incorporate these effects in a work of their own. I like to use King's "I Have a Dream" speech to illustrate the use of allusion, repetition and meter, and classic Japanese haiku as an easily grasped example of form. But these are merely my personal choices, near and dear to me, so I recommend you find poetry and poetic language that means something to you. I know I never feel happier or more productive than when I am teaching something that I love.

Whatever your model and objectives may be, take your time with poetry and let the students discover the beauty inherent in the spoken word. Encourage your students, within reason, to bring in tapes or compact discs that mean something to them and explicate the lyrics with them. They may be shocked to find out that the "the valley of the shadow of death" is a biblical allusion and not just a great line one of their rapper idols came up with.

After a few classes, depending on class length and student ability, have the students write a poem or some lyrics. Accept no excuses and praise all efforts, because this may be very difficult for some students. Allow ESL students to write in Spanish, if necessary, and have someone translate the work if need be.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bell, Anthea. *Fairy Tales of Wilhelm Hauff*. London: Abelard-Schramm, 1969.
A terrific series of stories I'd never read before. An excellent starting point for dramatic inspiration.
- Boland, Robert, and Paul Argentina. *Musical! Directing School and Community Theatre*. Colorado Springs: Meriwether Publishing, 1998.
This looks to be my Bible. It has a fairly extensive bibliography and seems as if it will be indispensable for next year's production.
- Crawford, Richard. *America's Musical Life*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2001.
A thorough, entertaining and highly accessible account of American music, from early Colonial times to the present. Crawford's straightforward narrative style makes musical history come alive.
- Ewen, David. *Songs of America*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1978.
This contains a wealth of information, often related in a flowery, quaint manner. Poetic language aside, Ewen packs a lot of into this slim book, including the score and lyrics to more than 50 songs in his "Cavalcade of Popular Songs."
- Ewen, David. *The World of Jerome Kern*. New York: Holt Rinehart Winston, 1960.
This is a marvelously in-depth look at Kern's life and work.
- Hodges, Margaret. *If You Had a Horse*. New York: Scribner's, 1984.
A great, very readable book, with nine horse-related myths and legends. More source material for a musical.
- Kingman, Daniel. *American Music; A Panorama*. New York, Schirmer Books, 1979.
This is a phenomenal, thorough exploration of American music. At times, it was a bit technical for readers without a strong musical background, but a wonderful reference book.
- Marriott, Alice and Carole K. Rachlin. *American Indian Mythology*. New York, Crowell, 1968.
Creation myths and explanations of natural phenomenon. This book is a pageant just waiting to happen!
- Mates, Julian. *The American Musical Stage before 1800*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1962.
This is an exhaustive look into Early American musical theatre. A wonderful book.

Paschen, Elise and Rebekah Presson Mosby, eds. *Poetry Speaks!* Naperville, Ill.: Sourcebooks, Inc., 2001.

This is a book near and dear to my heart. Filled with pithy essays by contemporary poets, facsimiles of working manuscripts, biographies and texts, it also has an amazing collection, on three CDs, of poets reading their own works. Charles Osgood narrates many of the readings, which gives historical and personal perspective to the works.

Wilson, Edwin. *The Theatre Experience*. New York, Hunter College and Graduate Center, The City University of New York, 1995.

This is the book that made me first realize how little I know about theatre. It's a wealth of information, from technical information to dramaturgy.