Broadway as Global Brand

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Abstract: For people around the world, “Broadway” means the Broadway musical, the epitome of singing and dancing, glamor and dazzle. Although the Broadway musical is customarily perceived as the most distinctively U.S. theatre form – whose national and municipal identity is embedded in its name – it has circumnavigated the globe countless times. As the globalized cultural economy increasingly facilitates the worldwide circulation of multinational theatrical productions, Broadway-style musicals are being manufactured from Hamburg to Shanghai. They are no longer a specifically U.S. form, but a global brand that freely crosses borders, genres, and styles.

The mobility of the newly deterritorialized Broadway musical is the result of many phenomena, notably the rise of a generation of producers, writers, directors, and actors around the world who have absorbed the musical’s conventions and vernaculars and who disseminate locally-produced musical entertainments. In the twenty-first century, these new Broadway-style musicals have become the preeminent transnational theatre form, whose conventions have also been absorbed into both popular and elite theatrical entertainments around the world.

Keywords: Broadway musicals, deterritorialization, operetta, German theatre, South Korean theatre

Theatre has always been on the move. Actors and companies are famously itinerant and when they travel, they take their conventions and idioms with them. With wholesale industrialization during the nineteenth century, the expansion of empire, and the development of steamships and railroads, the traffic in plays and players grew exponentially. Except during the two world wars, that growth has continued unabated to the present and in the twenty-first century, the export-import business in large-scale theatre is a multibillion dollar industry. In 2014, The Lion King, with cumulative worldwide ticket sales of $6.2 billion, overtook The Phantom of the Opera to become the largest grossing theatre piece of all time, far surpassing the $2.8 billion ticket sales for Avatar, the top-earning movie (“Broadway’s “The Lion King” n. pag.). Both Lion King and Phantom have been

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megahits on six continents and these and other franchises have an increasing impact on global theatre traditions.

In this essay, I am going to analyze the mobility of a theatrical form and style – let us call it the Broadway musical – which, I argue, has for one hundred years had a worldwide impact on the development of local theatre forms. Shows such as *Lion King* and *Phantom* were preceded by many other widely disseminated musicals, and are merely the most recent and high-profile expressions of a musical theatrical vernacular that has profoundly transformed theatre conventions on six continents. It is important to note, however, that not only popular or commercial work has been impacted; elite and esoteric modes of theatre practice have also been transformed by the Broadway musical. I am labeling this vernacular the Broadway musical because that is what millions of people around the world call it. Many languages and cultures have even adopted the English word *musical*, which allows prospective theatregoers to know what to expect when they see a play so marketed. This is certainly true of my two case studies, Germany and South Korea, two nations that have borrowed the word “musical” and have become the two centers for the production of musicals in continental Europe and East Asia respectively.

But first I want to consider the national and municipal pedigree of a theatre genre whose name is associated with a single New York thoroughfare. Just as Hollywood is identified with a particular kind of narrative cinema that developed during the 1920s and 1930s, so is the Broadway musical categorically linked to a kind of play into which are interwoven song and dance. Although the musical comprises a huge range of work, the genre consolidated its identity – as the emblematic U.S.-American theatrical genre – before the advent of the talkie. This is true despite the fact that the musical was already multiply hybridized in the early twentieth century. Before World War I, musicals and operettas proved their cosmopolitanism by making the rounds of European capitals and venturing even to New York. In most cases, they were heavily adapted and indigenized for local markets, often retaining little more than a few songs and characters from the originals. But even at the turn of the twentieth century, when most musicals did not originate in New York, the U.S. held a privileged place in the popular imagination. As early as 1903, the Berlin journalist Erich Urban extolled the Anglophone musical for its “Americanism”: “These swinging rhythms, these syncopations [...] met the continent’s ears like stinging blows,” bringing “to Europe’s slackened nerves a long-desired new sensation” (Linhardt 45). Even in these years, Peter Bailey notes, the U.S. was “supplanting Europe as the prime source of inspiration for popular music and the stage” (Bailey 139). In the U.S., meanwhile, the prewar musicals proved their modernity and their “Americanism” by provocatively mixing ragtime, jazz, Tin Pan Alley, vaudeville, and tap
dance with the plots and situations of nationally designated genres such as French, Austrian, German, and English operetta, Italian opera, and British music hall. Through two world wars and countless changes in musical fashion, the U.S. has retained its privileged position, despite the fact that several musicals that were especially important in opening up new markets are more aptly described as British than U.S. Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Cats* and *Phantom of the Opera*, usually labeled megamusicals (or poperettas), were the first to be mass-marketed and franchised on a large scale and became worldwide sensations during the 1980s, whetting the appetites of theatregoers in China, Korea, South Africa, and elsewhere. And while these megamusicals dominated the world market in the 1980s, they have since been replaced by a more heterogeneous collection of work that draws freely on an array of musical and theatrical vernaculars. I will continue to call them Broadway musicals, despite the fact that this designation elides questions of national origins and traditions even in the case of a piece such as *The Lion King*, which premiered in New York and was written and directed by U.S.-born artists but whose songs are penned by a British songwriting team. These questions about the national identity of the Broadway musical make it clear that the thoroughfare embedded in its name is less a real street than a fantasmatic origin and terminus in the global theatre industry. The fantasy of Broadway, with its dazzle, lights, and jazz is today as potent as the fantasy of Vienna in the early twentieth century, when it was evoked by titles like *Wiener Blut* (1899) and *Der letzte Walzer* (1920). Thanks to these operettas, many of which premiered not in Vienna but Berlin, the Austrian capital became inextricably associated with *Eleganz, Lebensfreude*, and three-quarter time. In the twenty-first century, what theatregoers call a Broadway musical need no longer originate or even play in the United States to glow with an unmistakably U.S.-American aura.

Because the deterritorialization of the Broadway musical represents both a marketing bonanza and a potential threat to U.S. producers, they have copyrighted their product. In 1997, the Broadway League, the trade association of the Broadway theatre industry, followed the lead of museums, opera companies, and symphony orchestras in the U.S. by hiring an advertising agency to help it stake out a distinctive brand. Thus was born, the same year that *The Lion King* premiered on Broadway, the trademark "Live Broadway" and its registered red and white logo. Because the League understood that Broadway has been shorthand for commercial theatre in New York City since the nineteenth century, it branded itself at a strategic moment when neoliberal globalization was at once reinforcing and compromising the identity of Broadway as a uniquely U.S.-American resource. The increasing economic clout of transnational entertainment conglomerates like Disney and the development of Broadway musical-like product in many
parts of the world has rendered the most distinctively U.S.-American form of theatre increasingly mobile.

The branding of a newly deterritorialized Broadway is the result of many phenomena, most notably the rise, from Hamburg to Seoul, of a generation of producers, writers, and directors who have absorbed the musical’s conventions and vernaculars and who disseminate locally-produced, U.S.-style musical entertainments. Despite the musical’s ubiquity, its worldwide impact has been studied far less than, for example, the spread of European theatrical realism to much of the world in the early twentieth century. Historians tend to ignore the fact that the Broadway musical, especially since World War II, has been just as pervasive and profound an influence as Ibsen and Chekhov. Indeed, as historians have noted, popular musical theatre became the emblematic performing art of the transnational metropolis during the early twentieth century, as theatres in the imperial capitals competed “across the same ground for authority over the hugely prestigious concept of modernity” (Platt 40). But the impact of these forms has been little studied in part because many historians, especially outside the U.S., too often assume that the scholarly analysis of elite cultural practices should remain distinct from the analysis of popular, commercial genres. The musical, however, like theatrical realism, has proven adept at mixing with indigenous traditions in part because it is a *combinatoire*, an accommodating collage of spoken dialogue and song. Unlike most opera, which uses recitative and aria, the musical (like operetta) provides diverse models for incorporating popular songs into plays. Moreover, it has proven more influential than opera since the late nineteenth century because its combination of spoken dialogue and song allows greater dramatic flexibility.

As collage, the musical is notably distinct from late Verdi and Puccini as well as a putatively seamless *Gesamtkunstwerk*, delighting in the disjunction between song and speech, or what Scott McMillin describes as “the crackle of difference” (2). The exploitation of this crackle has proven especially valuable for theatre that aims to break with Wagnerian or Ibsenesque models. Even Brecht’s epic theatre, which remains a cornerstone of elite cultural practice, owes a huge debt to operetta and its near relatives. In his notes to *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, which he wrote while living in Hollywood, Brecht insists that the play’s structure is “conditioned by a revulsion against the commercialized dramaturgy of Broadway” while bearing the imprint of an “older American theater whose forte lay in burlesques and ‘shows’” (195–6). This older theatre, in fact, was as resolutely commercial as the Broadway of the 1940s and the distinction he draws ignores the stylistic innovations of musical theatre during his years of exile in the U.S. Brecht’s own plays reveal that the distinction between “commercialized dramaturgy” and “shows” is elusive at best, especially in a work such as *Die Dreigroschenoper*, which avowedly cannibalizes popular musical and theatrical forms
and premiered at a commercial house, the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm, that specialized in operetta. Even Theodor Adorno, in the most appreciative notice he ever gave Kurt Weill, recognized that the piece has a “surface structure [that] easily accommodates the interpretation of it as new operetta.” Yet his claim that *Dreigroschenoper* “distorts” operetta ignores the fact that operetta itself was already distorted by the “stinging blows” of U.S.-Americanized musical theatre, a fact one cannot help but notice when one examines the jazz operettas of Paul Abraham, Emmerich Kálmán, and Mischa Spoliansky (Adorno 129-30). The pungently seductive work of these composers both appropriates and deforms an older operetta tradition but, crucially for Brecht and his critics, in a way that is far less politically programmatic than Brecht and Weill.

The close link between Berlin operettas and Broadway musicals is a sign of how vexed is the assertion that the musical is a uniquely U.S.-American form. While it is true that U.S. songwriters and producers were pivotal in disseminating it in the first decades of the twentieth century, Europeans had begun incorporating ragtime into their music at the turn of the century and jazz after World War I. By the 1920s, musical theatre in Europe and the U.S. bespoke a cosmopolitan modernity instantiated by Berlin and New York, the trendsetting hubs in both music and theatre. In this new regime, operetta was no more European than jazz was U.S.-American. In Berlin, “Americanism” became all the rage, “serv[ing] as a metaphor for Germany’s own modernity” (Stahrenberg & Grosch 190). In the U.S., meanwhile, operetta was wildly popular as a more elite, European alternative to musical comedy, with which, however, it became more and more intertwined. A landmark show such as Jerome Kern’s *Show Boat* (1927) uses operetta structure and musical dramaturgy while incorporating elements of both musical comedy and Broadway-style jazz. Despite the fact that U.S. jazz had a decisive influence on German popular and concert music as well as opera, the traffic in musical plays between Continental Europe and the U.S. remained primarily east to west. *Show Boat*, for example, was not performed in the German-speaking world until 1970 (in Freiburg). Instead, works such as Ralph Benatzky’s *Im weißen Rössl* became a worldwide hit. Opening at Berlin’s Grosses Schauspielhaus in 1930, it quickly crossed the English Channel, where it was turned into a “rapturously received” *White Horse Inn* in 1931. The next year, it opened in Paris as *L’auberge du cheval blanc* but did not debut on Broadway until 1936, after stops in Italy, Hungary, Spain, Denmark, Palestine, Australia, and the Belgian Congo (Norton & Clarke n. pag.). Its peregrinations well suited its subject, tourists at a picturesque inn in the Salzkammergut in Upper Austria, and Len Platt and Tobias Becker aptly describe the piece as an “appealing chocolate box fantasy of Germany as ‘Austria’” (Platt & Becker 129). Despite, or more likely, because of its exploitation of local color, *Im weißen Rössl* was thorough indigenized wherever it played. In
London, for example, the self-important Berlin manufacturer Wilhelm Giesecke became the snooty Londoner John Ebenezer Grinkle and then on Broadway the puffed-up Brooklynite William McGonigle. The U.S. version so completely turns it into a musical comedy that it makes one realize that it must have been a Broadway musical from the very start.

Despite the differences among the versions of Rössl, the basic plot and most of the songs traveled with it because they exemplify the conventions associated with the Broadway musical during its so-called Golden Age, between World War I and the late 1960s. Like most musicals, its plotline has several pairs of would-be lovers who are brought together by the finale. Like most, Rössl is strewn with songs whose different styles are predicated on their function. For scores are always composed of a discrete body of song types: ballads, comedy songs, charm songs, love duets, character songs, and choruses (cf. Engel). These songs, moreover, usually employ a three-part modular structure that renders them both dramatic and theatrical: an introductory verse, a refrain (the most memorable part of the song), and a contrasting bridge or release. This modular structure guarantees that it, unlike a typical rock or blues song, has a dramatic arc. A returns as non-A. Im weissen Rössl differs from most musicals and operettas in a telling detail, however. In most, the leading couple are the highest in social class (and the seriousness of their musical idiom). The leads in Rössl, however, are respectable bourgeois while the rich industrialists are the buffoons. The placement of the bourgeoisie center stage is a clear sign of the piece’s status as musical rather than operetta, in which the protagonists typically are upper-class or aristocratic. Marion Linhardt emphasizes that the rise of these popular musical theatre forms is in fact linked to “the emergence of a broad and relatively affluent, urban middle class – an audience for an attractive form of theatrical entertainment that enjoyed a certain prestige while remaining distinct from the aristocratic” (47).

The appeal of works like Im weißen Rössl, in all its incarnations, to a broad swath of the middle class is indissolubly linked to questions about the relative position of musicals in different cultural traditions. For there is no question but that the cultural dispensation in Germany and Austria is more clearly hierarch-

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1 Although the phrase Golden Age is common among musical theatre specialists, I use it reluctantly in part because most specialists link it to an extremely problematic concept, the so-called integrated musical, and use it to denote the period from Oklahoma! (1943) until the late 1960s, when the rock musical began to supplant the Rodgers and Hammerstein formula. Because of my skepticism about the viability of the concept of the integrated musical, I would prefer to theorize the Golden Age more in musical terms, beginning in the early 1920s with the appearance of jazz-inflected musicals like Shuffle Along (1921) and Lady, Be Good (1924) and ending with the triumph of rock in the late 1960s.
ized and more inflexible than that which obtains in the United States. In the U.S., a theatrical hierarchy was consolidated after World War I predicated on the opposition between highbrow literary theatre and low- to middlebrow popular entertainments such as vaudeville, revue, and musicals. But the regime that opposed Eugene O'Neill to Irving Berlin gradually broke down over the course of the twentieth century, especially in the wake of the 1960s, as plays and musicals alike became conversant with avant-gardist techniques and rock ‘n’ roll became the dominant musical idiom. By the end of the century, what passed itself off as elite culture was no longer predicated on a modernist embrace of dissonance and rebellion coupled with a refusal of the commodity form. So too, popular music, Hollywood films, and Broadway musicals became more experimental in form and content as they were no longer required to be immediately palatable and user-friendly. The disintegration of the cultural hierarchy in the U.S. has been attended by a disruption and attenuation of class-based identities and identifications. Even a style like hip hop, which began in the 1970s as an African American street vernacular, has been incorporated into opera and musical theatre.

By way of example, consider the runaway Broadway hit, Lin-Manuel Miranda’s musical Hamilton (2015), which superimposes hip hop music, lyrics, and dance onto an old-fashioned, Masterpiece Theatre-style biographical drama about the Founding Fathers of the United States. This self-described “revolutionary” musical takes as its hero Alexander Hamilton, the first Secretary of the Treasury, a man championed by the so-called Reagan Revolution, and preaches a kind of bootstrap entrepreneurialism highly compatible with contemporary U.S.-style neoliberalism, while unmistakably sideling the women. Most important, it adorns a conservative subject and musical dramaturgy with a progressive musical style, casting the Founding Fathers (and Mothers) with African American, Latino, and Asian American actors, to incite a rethinking of U.S.-Americanness and an expansion of the language of the Broadway musical. Winner of the 2016 Pulitzer Prize in Drama and countless other awards, Hamilton emblematizes a moment in the US that delights in a jarring and unpredictable juxtaposition of what used to be called highbrow and lowbrow, which is to say, of antagonistic musical, theatrical, and political idioms. Described by Michelle Obama as “the best piece of art in any form I have ever seen in my life,” it is such a runaway hit in New York that its producers are planning productions all over the world (Marks n. pag.). In other words, its hyper-U.S.-Americanness, in both form and subject matter, ironically seems to make it ripe for a global invasion slated to begin in 2017 (cf. Sokolove).

Given the worldwide trade in Broadway musicals, it is likely that two cities in which Hamilton will soon set up shop are Hamburg and Seoul, both hubs for the production of US musicals and both centers for the development of Broadway musical-like product. And while Germany and Korea might seem unlikely sites for
Hamilton, these nations share far more than audiences with a passion for musicals. Granted, the two countries have utterly different theatrical and musical histories, but since World War II, also bear striking similarities. Both nations were partitioned by the Cold War, occupied by the U.S., and often regarded (partly for these reasons) as the most Americanized countries in their geopolitical spheres – or, more precisely, ones in which Americanization has been especially pronounced and contested. After having been devastated by warfare in the mid twentieth century, both nations became economic powerhouses specializing in consumer goods and both benefited considerably from the World Trade Organization’s relaxation of trade restrictions. Although Germany’s re-industrialization occurred twenty-five years before Korea’s, both nations have since the 1990s seen a boom in Broadway-style entertainments as local producers have bought, renovated, and built theatres to accommodate Broadway shows. But the flow has not simply been one-way. During the same decade, German and Korean producers began investing in home-grown musicals and shipping large-scale productions to New York.

The importance of Germany and South Korea as centers for the production of both U.S. and locally made musicals should not disguise the fact that musicals occupy very different positions in the cultural hierarchies of both countries. In both, tickets for commercial musicals are considerably more expensive than those for state-subsidized theatres. In Korea, musicals, whether imported from the U.S. or Europe or made in Korea, are considered an elite brand of entertainment that appeals to audiences with a taste for socially liberal art. Together with Western classical music and opera, they signal Korea’s status as a Westernized cultural and economic powerhouse. Simone Genatt, the President of Broadway Asia, notes how musicals function today in the world marketplace:

Broadway is an incredibly powerful brand. Much more powerful [abroad] . . . than in the American system. It really denotes money [and] the best of the West . . . . And when . . . an economy emerges, they tend to brand themselves with Broadway. That’s what’s happened over the last twenty years, so that as the emerging markets have come into the system, whether Latin America or China or Dubai, . . . they tend to brand themselves with Broadway to show that they are a market to be reckoned with and a market that has clout and money. (Genatt n. pag.)

I want to emphasize, however, that musicals in Korea mean far more than clout and money. They, along with K-pop, represent an attempt at both consolidating and disseminating a hip Korean cosmopolitanism that is in fact bankrolled by vast sums of both private and public capital. But the investment is paying off insofar as Koreans have become extremely adept at producing and performing foreign musicals and crafting their own for local consumption and export. Its two most widely traveled pieces, The Last Empress (1995) and Hero: the Musical
(2009), are uncompromisingly nationalistic historical dramas about Korea's struggle against Japanese imperialism and toured the U.S., Canada, and the U.K. Using the conventions associated with both opera and the Broadway musical, they attest to the skill of Korean writers at forging a musical style that dexterously re-employs Orientalist clichés, and of Korean singers and musicians at mastering Western musical techniques.

The situation for musicals in the German-speaking world is very different from Korea in part because of the much longer history of large-scale music theatre and the profusion of state-subsidized houses which perform a dizzying array of offerings. But in addition to these Staatstheater, Germany and Austria have major commercial theatres, most of them run by Stage Entertainment or Vereinigte Bühnen Wien, as well as a Freie Theaterszene that produces a wide range of relatively small-scale music theatre. In the first postwar years, several U.S. musicals were warmly received in Germany, but it was My Fair Lady that rewrote the rules. When first staged at Berlin's Theater des Westens in 1961, it was rapturously received, a "theatrical miracle" that made the musical "an integral and permanent part of the German stage repertoire" (Jansen 255). Indeed, My Fair Lady was part of the first wave of U.S. imports that provided the German theatre with most of the musicals that are still performed at state-subsidized theatres. These include Kiss Me, Kate, West Side Story, Fiddler on the Roof (titled Anatevka in German), and a few others. The second wave of imports, which accounts for most of the musicals that play in commercial theatres, began in 1983 with the premiere of Cats at Vienna's Theater an der Wien. Since then, Stage Entertainment and Vereinigte Bühnen Wien have premiered many Broadway musicals and shipped their own products to Broadway and many other parts of the world, including Korea.

These large-scale products are by no means the only German theatre works that bear the imprint of the Broadway musical. One must bear in mind, however, that the German-language theatre is much more strictly hierarchized than theatre in the U.S., in part because of the German music industry's clearly drawn distinctions between "U und E," meaning Unterhaltungsmusik (light or entertaining music) and ernste Musik (serious or art music), a distinction that dates back to the nineteenth century and is symptomatic of the need to classify and protect art music from the encroachment of entertainment. Despite the fact that this difference has become increasingly difficult to police, the distinction between "U und E" is still bandied about by critics and written into the German Copyright Admin-

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istration Act (Urheberrechtswahrnehmungsgesetz), which singles out “culturally significant works and achievements” for preferment by the distribution practices of copyright collectives such as GEMA (Gesellschaft für musikalische Aufführungs- und mechanische Vervielfältigungsrechte) (Fülle 6). GEMA, in fact, has a meticulously crafted table of fourteen categories of occasions and locales for live musical performance which pivots around the distinction between E-Musik – and everything else (GEMA n. pag.).

Theatre scholars in the German-speaking world tend to steer clear of the analysis of musicals, even a musical like Kiss Me, Kate, which is an operetta in everything but name and is so widely- and well-performed in state-subsidized theatres. There is, however, a growing body of scholarship on the large corpus of music and sound theatre, or what Matthias Rebstock and David Roesner call Composed Theatre (cf. Rebstock and Roesner). Focusing on work from the late nineteenth century to the present, these scholars analyze theatre as a musical composition, constructing a genealogy that leads from Wagner, Schoenberg, and John Cage to the work of directors with impeccable high-culture credentials, such as Christoph Marthaler, Einar Schleef, Michael Thalheimer, and Rene Pollesch. These scholars provide rich, well-informed, rigorous analyses, but like most Theaterwissenschaftler, they focus almost exclusively on Euro-American avant-gardist traditions, “high art” practices of canonical composers and their notated works,” steering clear of non-Western musical theatre as well as work that smacks of the popular (Roesner, “It is not about labelling” 326). This last omission is especially regrettable because in the twenty-first century German-speaking world, many productions of operas, musicals, and operettas make use of the same conventions associated with directors like Marthaler and Pollesch. Although Hans-Thies Lehmann’s postdramatic theatre is at this point, very old news, Lehmann is certainly not unique among scholars in dismissing musicals summarily as “profitable and ridiculous mass entertainment” (180). Yet contemporary theatre in Germany, with its penchant to incorporate song, is, I would argue, always already inflected by the conventions of musical theatre. Nicolas Ste- mann’s 2011 production of Goethe’s Faust, although by no means a musical, is emblematic of large-scale work that pointedly features interpolated songs. In an unusually self-reflexive moment in Part 2, a drunken Mephistopheles (Philipp Hochmair), relaxing in a lounge chair in a fantasy future, launches into a discus-

sion of postdramatic theatre (in English) in which he defines it as a performance into which is inserted video, classical music, and rock. Mephistopheles may be a cynical fiend, but his précis of the postdramatic does indeed describe the production in which he appears – and much contemporary theatre beside.

Although it is difficult to pinpoint the inauguration of the use of rock songs in German productions of classic plays, it became conventionalized during the 1980s. Frank Castorf’s “Rock’n’Roll-Theater” used English-language rock to shock and unnerve East German audiences, as in his 1985 production of Nora (A Doll’s House) in Anklam, which substituted the Rolling Stones’ “Honky Tonk Woman” for the tarantella and ended with Nora and Helmer stripping to Jiln Hendrix’s “Voodoo Child” before exiting the most notorious door in all theatre (Hübchen & Arnst, cited in Balitzki 56–8). Three years later, Castorf divided Munich critics and audiences by employing the Beatles’ “Why Don’t We Do It in the Road” as a “musical leitmotif” in his production of the first German bourgeois tragedy, Lessing’s Miss Sara Sampson (Carlson 98). While popular songs serve many purposes in contemporary theatre, they usually play upon the audience’s familiarity with the song and the song’s ontology as both cultural artifact and subjective expression. Unlike background or mood music, a song interpolated into a play amplifies the “crackle of difference,” asserting itself, in David Roesner’s words, “as an equal with or against dramatic figures, texts, images, light and space” (“No more” n. pag.). The resulting Mephistophelean collage provides a kind of shock that, as Roesner notes, exploits “the capacity of pop songs to compress narratives and emotional landscapes into a very short form, to cut to the bone” (Musicality 236). This technique, moreover, underscores the doubleness of performance, or, in Nikolaus Müller-Schöll’s words, the fact that “two actions” take place “at the same time in any theatre: the presented action and the very act of (re)presenting.” For the eruption of song, whether in Stemann’s Faust or Kiss Me, Kate, “intervenes in the relation between sign and referent, speaker and the spoken, actor and acting,” calling attention to the act of performing and the materiality of performance (43–4).

To close, I would like to call your attention to the work of a German director who has most provocatively reinvented the Broadway musical. I am referring here to Herbert Fritsch, who became a star director in 2011, when two of his productions, Ibsen’s Nora and Hauptmann’s Der Biberpelz, were chosen to be presented at the Berliner Theatertreffen. Since then, he has directed all over the German-

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4 I saw this Faust, in which Mephistopheles’s lines are not completely set in advance, at the Thalia in Hamburg on 3 April 2015. Email correspondence with dramaturg Benjamin von Blomberg, 1 May 2015.
speaking world and four other productions of his have been invited to the Theatertreffen. Fritsch is one of the few highly acclaimed German directors who is not afraid to be called an entertainer (Unterhaltungskünstler). Indeed, he prides himself on making “full-steam-ahead theatre, radically artificial, slapstick, [and] anarchic,” which exuberantly flouts the conventional wisdom that considers farce trivial and shallow. No other German director has been inspired equally by the historical avant-garde and by low comedians like the Marx Brothers, Jerry Lewis, Jacques Tati, Peter Sellers, and Monty Python. Most important, Fritsch’s plays are filled with music because he insists that all theatre is Musiktheater. He notes that language, with its rhythm and melody, is always music and explains that he loves “the extreme gestures of opera and ballet.” When he directed Nora, he told his actors to “make it an opera” (“Warum Paul Linckes” n. pag.). But it is not only the melody of language or the outsize gestures that make his work music theatre. All his productions represent collaborations with composer/musicians, orchestras, or opera companies and all delight in the “crackle of difference.” And it is worth remembering that he first worked with his theatrical mentor, Frank Castorf, playing Mellefont in his 1988 Miss Sara Sampson. Fritsch followed Castorf to the Volksbühne Berlin in 1993 and until 2007 was one of the leading — and “wildest” — actors in the company. Since then, he has directed many different kinds of music theatre, including opera, operetta, and what is best described, following U.S. terminology, as a jukebox musical, that is, a play into which a composer’s songbook is interpolated. Fritsch’s jukebox musical is Carlo Goldoni’s Trilogie der Sommerfrische, with songs by the 1960s Italian pop songwriter, Gino Paoli.

The productions of Herbert Fritsch, like those of so many other German directors attest to the great mobility of the Broadway musical, the most transnationalized of all theatrical genres. Despite their pervasive influence, however, musicals are usually not part of the syllabi of English-language theatre classes in the non-Anglophone world. This gap is in part a result of the continuing prejudice against popular forms on the part of literary scholars, despite the fact that musicals provide exciting and innovative canon-expanding opportunities. However, they also provide challenges. To appreciate them requires familiarity with librettos, songs, and the history of the genre. In other words, to understand Cole Porter’s dramaturgy in Kiss Me, Kate, one must be conversant with the conventions of both musical comedy and The Taming of the Shrew. Yet what better way to initiate students into the mysteries of Shakespeare than with a Cole Porter ditty?

Brush up your Shakespeare,
Start quoting him now.
Brush up your Shakespeare,
And the women you will wow.
Works Cited


DE GRUYTER


Bionote

David Savran

David Savran is a specialist in twentieth and twenty-first century U.S. theatre, musical theatre, and social theory. He is the author of eight books, whose wide-ranging subjects include the Wooster Group, Tennessee Williams, Tony Kushner, white masculinity, music theatre, and middlebrow cultural production. His Highbrow/Lowdown: Theater, Jazz, and the Making of the New Middle Class is the winner of the Joe A. Callaway Prize. He has, in addition, served as a judge for the Obie Awards and the Lucille Lortel Awards and was a juror for the 2011 and 2012 Pulitzer Prize in Drama. He is the Vera Mowry Roberts Distinguished Professor of Theatre at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York.