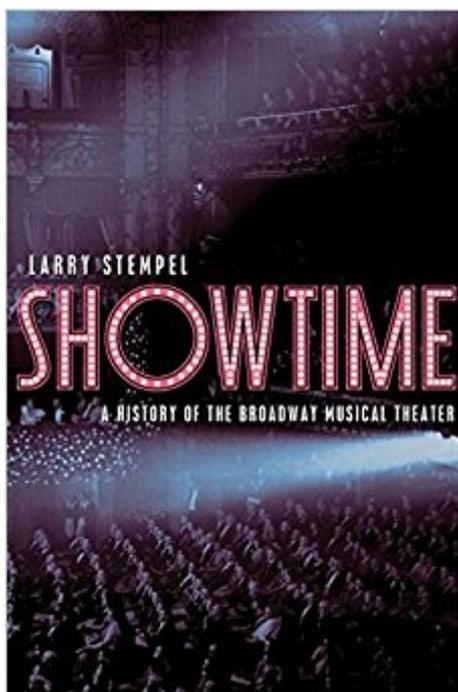


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Showtime: A History Of The Broadway Musical Theater



Synopsis

The definitive history of the Broadway musical: the shows, the stars, the movers, and the shakers. Showtime brings the history of Broadway musicals to life in a narrative as engaging as the subject itself. Beginning with the scandalous Astor Place Opera House riot of 1849, Larry Stempel traces the growth of musicals from minstrel shows and burlesques, through the golden age of Show Boat and Oklahoma!, to such groundbreaking works as Company and Rent. Stempel describes the Broadway stage with vivid accounts of the performers drawn to it, and detailed portraits of the creators who wrote the music, lyrics, and stories for its shows, both beloved and less well known. But Stempel travels outside the theater doors as well, to illuminate the wider world of musical theater as a living genre shaped by the forces of American history and culture. He reveals not only how musicals entertain their audiences but also how they serve as barometers of social concerns and bearers of cultural values. Showtime is the culmination of decades of painstaking research on a genre whose forms have changed over the course of two centuries. In covering the expansive subject before him, Stempel combines original research—including a kaleidoscope of primary sources and archival holdings—with deft and insightful analysis. The result is nothing short of the most comprehensive, authoritative history of the Broadway musical yet published. 16 pages of four-color; 105 black-and-white illustrations

Book Information

Hardcover: 848 pages

Publisher: W. W. Norton & Company (September 6, 2010)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0393067157

ISBN-13: 978-0393067156

Product Dimensions: 6.5 x 1.8 x 9.6 inches

Shipping Weight: 2.7 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (17 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #106,797 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #30 in [Books > Arts &](#)

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Customer Reviews

This is the most complete, most detailed, and most illuminating book on the history and

development of musical theater, from its beginnings to the present day. It is perhaps more than some want to know about this art form, and yet if one is to really understand it, the amount of detail provided is extremely helpful. Another reviewer has pointed out that the author's personality does not come through, but this is clearly meant as a scholarly (in the best sense of the word) work, where personal opinion would be out of place. I love the opinion-laden books of Ethan Mordden, but am always aware that I am reading a very particular viewpoint. Here, I have the feeling that the author is trying to pull together all this is known about musical theater in the U.S., in a way that helps us make sense of the various streams of influence, as they have joined to create a form that itself has shifted and changed over the years. This is not a book I was able to read straight through--I found myself reading a chapter, and then putting down the book to think about what I had read. That's unusual for me. I like the way the book is organized, with 3-4 musicals per chapter used as examples--often in great detail. This heavy volume is clearly a labor of love, and I know of no other recent book that provides so much information on the subject.

First let me explain what this book is not. It is not a loveletter to Broadway. Instead it is a deeply researched history on how the Broadway Musical Stage has evolved over 100 years...from humble beginnings in comic opera....to vaudeville...to the Golden Age of Musical Broadway...to Bob Fosse...to Disney Productions...and beyond. The major themes are the social or stylistic influences which caused new directions in the Broadway Show such as the introduction of ballet style dancing in the 1940's or jazz dancing in the 1950's and later. Important contributions in staging are not ignored either...like the baroque, opulent sets of "Phantom of the Opera" with its 100 candles recreating a haunted world beneath a belle epoque Opera House. The treatise is not so much about the lives of the movers and shakers as about why their influences "worked" in the time of history that the show went on. I will discuss two examples: Carousel and Gypsy. In Carousel, the author explains that "while Oklahoma developed the moral argument for sending American boys overseas, Carousel offered consolation to those wives and mothers whose boys would only return in spirit." In writing about Gypsy, I learned that it broadened the dramatic scope of musical comedy and turned the conventions of that genre into "the stuff of drama." In other words, "Gypsy says something different and fairly hard to take: that every child eventually has to become responsible for his parents. That you outgrow your parents and then eventually they become your responsibility." It is the kind of book to sip like a great wine...slowly and carefully to appreciate all the nuances and textures. I think it is a wonderful scholarly treatise that makes the Broadway Musical not only fun, but meaningful in American history.

At this point, there are a few books covering the history of music theater. Some present it as dry statistics, some take a chronological approach, and some take a very editorialized chronological approach (American Musical Theater: A Chronicle comes immediately to mind). I think the only way to get a grasp on the progress of the musical is to read as many of these as possible and synthesize their thoughts. So, add to that pile this excellent book. It uses a conceptual angle. So there is a chapter on Off-Broadway, a chapter on concept musicals, a chapter on post-modern "antimusicals", etc. This is an effective, entertaining, and interesting way to go about it. The reason there are only four stars instead of five is that the book tends to leave out shows that were more obscure or had short runs. But, going back to the beginning of this review, "Strike Up the Band: A New History of Musical Theatre" and "Off-Broadway Musicals Since 1919: From Greenwich Village Follies to the Toxic Avenger" will cover the ground left over and give you a pretty decent comprehensive review.

Best (actually ONLY) textbook on the musical theatre would make this invaluable, but add that it is delightful and readable makes this part of my permanent bedside reading collection. Mr. Stempel's knowledge and love of the subject is clear throughout the book. The organization and chapter headings make it ideal for teaching and learning the historical development of the genre. I love this book and give it as a gift frequently to fellow lover's of musical theatre. Congratulations and gratitude for writing this wonderful book, Mr Stempel.

I expected more showbiz, bright lights and fun than this survey provides. Stempel's book is academic, fact-filled and heavy going. Little of the joy of the Broadway musical transcends the pedestrian prose. Nevertheless, it's a worthy catalogue of shows, many of which I'd seen and enjoyed.

In short, the book served it's purpose and was exactly what I required from a textbook. I used this book to write about the advancements and progression of musical theater. I enjoyed this book because, like all history books, it was presented chronologically which made writing essays a lot easier. I didn't find the writing too engaging but it was easy to get through the two or three chapters that I needed for that particular essay. The information and the layout were convenient and I would recommend this book to anyone who was interested in learning about musical theater.

The absolute BEST book I have ever read about Musical Theatre. I grew up reading Stanley Green's WORLD OF MUSICAL COMEDY and have read almost every book about Musicals in my 64 years but this book truly stands out as superbly researched, everything is brilliantly discussed and (for a change) I found not one factual error! Also a very thoughtful and intelligent approach to very old musicals and the very new musicals. A sensational job by an excellent writer who I had not know of previously.

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