

**T AR 441/541: History of Musical Theatre**

**Assignment Sheet: Group Performance Response**

In teams of 7-8 students, you will present short 15-20 minute performance responses based on additional research into the musical texts that we are studying this semester.

**Group #1, *South Pacific*, 2/22 (paper due 2/19)**

**Group #2, *West Side Story*, 3/8 (paper due 3/5)**

**Group #3, *The Cradle Will Rock*, 3/29 (paper due 3/24)**

**Group #4, *Into the Woods*, 4/12 (paper due 4/9)**

**Group #5, *Wicked*, 4/26 (paper due 4/23)**

At the beginning of the classes marked as performance days, groups will present their performance responses and these participate in a class discussion about the musical. Performed responses should be approached as workshop experiences, more experimental than presentational in tone, with attention given to process over product.

Performed responses should **communicate an analysis** of your assigned musicals. This is not a performance of the musical; rather, it is performed critique, a presentation that embodies a certain perspective toward the musical or posits an argument about its cultural meaning. Performance choices should be bold and evocative, challenging us to reconsider what we know about the musical. Consider carefully:

- What was the original context (social, political, economic) of the musical and what culture circumstances influenced its development? How did that context prompt specific production choices? How does it continue to shape our understanding of the musical?
- What does this musical have to say to current audiences? It is still relevant? Does it merit reinvestigation through contemporary production?
- How might its original meanings change when encountered by spectators today? Are there specific production choices that would challenge an audience to rethink their assumptions about the musical?

In developing your performance, you will need to conduct research beyond the class lectures and reading assignments. Each person is responsible for part of the overall research conducted; decide early on who is interested in what aspect of the musical, and let these interests guide your direction. Beyond your research responsibilities, teams will divide the additional responsibilities of the facilitation according to these positions:

- **Stage Management/ Preceptor Liaison:** Responsibilities include leading group meetings, creating brief reports of meetings activities, submitting reports and maintaining a dialogue with the preceptor, and facilitating communication between members.
- **Design:** Responsibilities include the gathering of minimal properties, costumes, etc. for the performance, planning and organizing the arrangement of the performance space (classroom), and arranging for/setting up any needed technology.
- **Marketing:** Responsibilities include gathering and compiling information and research from other team members, creating the performance program from this material, copying/ distributing the program to the instructor and other students in the class; the program should include includes the title of your performance, director's notes, a scene breakdown, a cast list, and other relevant information you deem necessary.
- **Directing/Dramaturgy:** Responsibilities include leading group discussions about analysis of the musical, creating discussion questions from research material gathered from the team and joining the preceptor to lead class discussion on relevant issues raised in the team's presentation, and creating the bibliography by compiling the team's resources (the bibliography should include at least 10 consulted sources that show your depth and breadth of research; no Wikipedia).
- **Book:** Responsibilities include transcribing the groups' analysis of the musical into a performance text, revising the text through the rehearsal process, and providing copies of the final text to all group members, the preceptor, and the instructor.
- **Performer 1 and Performer 2:** Responsibilities include working closely with the book writer and director/dramaturg to create characters and performing those characters in the class presentation. Performers will take on the principle roles of the performance, but should also feel free to assign smaller roles to other team members as needed.

(If your team has 8 members, you can choose to have a second designer or a third performer.)

It is expected that group members will meet **at least** twice outside of class to coordinate research and creative responsibilities. And, these meetings should begin **at least** two weeks before the presentation. It is not mandatory that all team members be at every meeting (with 7-8 people teams, I know there will be difficulty in scheduling), therefore all team members must be diligent in communicating with the stage manager and staying in contact with other teams members. Email addresses will be provided, and I encourage you to share cell phone #'s with one another. It is possible to receive a grade lower than your group if you do not

participate fully. All groups are encouraged to meet with me or Kevin in advance to discuss ideas. My office hours are MW 2:00-3:00 and by appointment.

Some tips:

- Groups can include costumes and props as part of their performance, but focus your primary energies in the development of a presentation and facilitated discussion that shows the quality of your research and analysis. (i.e. don't go overboard with unnecessary stuff).
- Comedy is an effective mode of analysis, but be critical enough to know that you aren't merely going for the easy laugh. Sometimes a quiet or serious moment can be particularly effective in driving home your argument.
- Be creative about your use of the classroom; during your 15-20 minutes, you will have free reign to re-configure the room in any way that supports your performance. Indeed, you may even decide to have us leave the classroom. That being said, remember that you **ONLY** have 15-20 minutes....period. Any set-up and strike must be done quickly and efficiently to maximize your performance time.

### **Analysis Paper:**

In addition to collaborating with your performance group, each individual member will write a separate analysis essay that interprets the cultural relevance of the musical explored by your group through a close reading of its score and libretto. Use your work on the performed response as a place to start, but feel free to explore an interpretation of the musical that challenges or contradicts the performance. Essays will be 3-4 pages in length; although this is a short paper, make sure that you introduce your analysis properly and present a concise and persuasive argument about the cultural relevance of the text.

The only source needed for your essay is the musical text, but if you decide to include additional research, use MLA format for citations. All reports will be due the class period *before* your performance day.

**A Question/Answer Session with Hypothetical Student X:**

Student X: Dr. Essin, this is a confusing assignment. Wouldn't you rather I just write a research paper?

La Essin: Writing is vital form of communication, one that should be mastered by all theatre students. But I am keenly aware that theatre students are particularly proficient in the arts of crafting performance, and I tend to see richer textual analysis emerge from projects where students are encouraged to use skills with which they are most proficient.

Student X: Wow...that's deep, Dr. Essin. I never thought of it that way...

La Essin: See...you are learning something new already.

Student X: So, it's not a paper, it's a performance...do we just do scenes from the musical?

La Essin: Not quite. That's not to say you might include one of the musical numbers in your presentation, but the performance should be crafted into something that offers a commentary on the musical. It should embody your group's analysis of the performance as a cultural text.

Student: Brilliant!

La Essin: I know, right?

Student: OK, Dr. Essin but I'm a designer...not an actor. And my friend Hattsie over here isn't an actor either. Do we have to sing? And dance?

La Essin: You don't have to, but you could give it a shot. These projects are more about group learning in a supportive community environment, not a polished performance. No one will be expecting perfect pitch or seemingly effortless choreography. And if you are totally petrified to perform in front of class, you can contribute in other ways—researching, writing the script, gathering props, creating discussion questions, etc.

Student: I'm suddenly so inspired! Thanks, Dr. Essin

La Essin: You're welcome, Student X. Go Wildcats.

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**Group Performance Response**

**Musical:**

**Group Members:**

**Performance (40 pts):**

- Did the performance demonstrate a clear understanding of course concepts? (20 pts)
- Did the performance present a persuasive, compelling analysis of the musical? (20 pts)

**Research (40 pts):**

- Did the performance and program demonstrate research into the cultural context and production history of the musical? (20 pts)
- Did the project bibliography demonstrate a thorough examination of scholarly resources relevant to the text and musical theatre history in general? (20 pts)

**Group collaboration (20 pts):**

- Did the group submit a clear, organized agenda detailing meeting times and objectives? (10 pts)
- Did the performance and supporting materials demonstrate an equal distribution of work among group members? (10 pts)