



Susanne Vill

Musicals

Entertainment and Mirrors of Social Realities

The first rule of theatre is similar to Billy Wilder's motto "you shall not bore!" To achieve attention and curiosity, theatrical genres draw on a mixture of amusing and shocking elements. The tragedies in drama and opera seria impress the audience with horrifying violence, power, deceit, hatred and murder, counting on a relief in a catastrophe. Mirroring social realities in theatrical plots exposes cruelty, crime, harm and damage, hoping that theatrical presentations of the evil will not boost aggressive bents, but induce a catharsis that leads to prevention and yields a socially acceptable effect.

In contrast to sorrow and shiver the popular theatre takes care for the audience's relief and serves the expectations for some time to forget the harm of a scary fate, to relax, to be entertained, enjoyed, amused, regenerated and energized by the performance. Cheerful, humorous stories lighten up the spectator's mood and distract their attention from a dull, unhappy or depressing everyday-life. Music inescapably enhances these effects by transmitting its motoric energy through the rhythm, color and the intensities of sound to the listeners. This recipe for success functions in many cultures of the world. In Europe it evolved from the ancient Greek comedies with music and dances through various theatrical genres up to its youngest sequel, the musical.

Many ancestors stood at its cradle: the opera buffa, Singspiel, opéra comique, operetta, zarzuela, vaudeville, burlesque, extravaganza, minstrelsy and the show. Eighteen years after Jacques Offenbach developed the Paris operetta from the Opéra comique to „opéra bouffe“ (several acts), „opérette bouffe“ (one act), to „bouffonnerie musicale“ or „folie musicale“, in 1866 the first musical appeared in New York. A guest performance of David Costa's Parisienne Ballet Troupe should take place in the New York Academy of music. Unfortunately it burnt down, so that the ballet was transferred to "Niblo's Garden" on Broadway where it was integrated in Charles Barras' melodrama *The Black Crook* with music of different sources and a few new compositions.¹ In spite of its duration of more than five hours *The Black Crook* became so successful, that, in revised versions, it stayed in the New York repertoire up to 1930. A new genre of the popular music theatre was born: the musical. From the binning on it shared with other forms of popular music theatre an inclination to entertainment, phantasmagoria and glamour.

The audience of popular theatre expects to see beauty, joy, easy living and amazing events in order to relax and enhance their fantasies of something different from their usual environment. So, the entertaining genres prefer comedies. As all kinds of dramatic theatre they also need excitement produced by tensions and conflicts. Like operettas also musicals use private, personal conflicts among almost equal partners, disturbance, harmless accidents, errors or mistakes in love affairs and temporary infidelity which allow a complete solution in a happy end. Successful was the maxim of Johann Strauß' *Die Fledermaus*: "Glücklich ist,

¹ Giuseppe Operti's *March of the Amazons* and *Naughty, Naughty Men* by George Bickwell and Theodore Kennick.

wer vergisst, was doch nicht zu ändern ist”² [Happy the one who forgets, what cannot be changed.]



Johann Strauss Sohn, *Die Fledermaus*, vocal score, Leipzig: August Cranz (1890), reprint: New York: E. F. Kalmus (1933-70), p. 42.

Many musicals also follow this recipe to present a nostalgic brave old world. The opposite, dystopic settings, are rare like in Queen's musical *We will rock you* (2002) or Moritz Eggert's discourse about actual conspiracy theories in his "operetta" *Die letzte Verschwörung* (2023).

Musicals work on a commercial basis and mirror the contemporary society.

Like all genres of theatre musicals function as mirrors of the contemporary society, its state of mind, morals, conventions, problems and events. But the genres of popular theater have to earn their living on their own. Only a few subsidized theatres play musicals sustained by state grant. Since theatres left the area of aristocratic protection, the bourgeois theatre troupes could only survive by attracting a big, paying audience. The commercial basis caused a certain pandering to the public taste. The musical had to discover and to serve the audience's pleasure, to spare their feelings, to affirm their convictions, to satisfy the wish for entertainment, easing and hope. On the other hand the musical always tried to invent and present actually relevant and trendy performances.

A big variety of different subjects, local and temporary features, musical styles and mixtures of different elements came into being. The musical's peculiar mixture of drama, music, singing, acting, dance and amazing sceneries produced many subgenres, such as the compilation/ jukebox musical, black musical, book musical, Broadway opera, concept musical, extravaganza, musical comedy, jazz musical, rock opera and dance musical.³

The worldwide spreading of the young genre of music theatre came up with all kinds of subjects and motives such as: politics, biographic musicals, fairy tales, myths, religion, historical events, antiquity, adaptations from: literature, plays, movies, operas, comic strips, theater on theater/ backstage routine, film, psychology, portraits of cities in the USA, landscapes and states of the USA, locations and actions in America outside the USA, Europe, sports, school and university.⁴

The following statistics, published by Deutscher Bühnenverein in *Wer spielte was*⁵ list musicals which are produced in special musical theaters with special musical troupes as well as musicals produced in opera houses and theatres with the branches drama, music theatre and ballet. Often non specialized music theatres stage musicals for their budget's benefit and to attract a younger audience.

For a long time European theatres could only get the rights of performing the great Broadway and London West End hits, if they bought the complete set and engaged their staff.

² *Die Fledermaus*, music: Johann Strauß Sohn, libretto: Karl Haffner, Richard Genée, I. Act, No. 5 Finale, Alfred; excerpt from the vocal score, Leipzig: August Cranz (1890), reprint: New York: E.F. Kalmus (1933-70), p. 42, <https://s9.imslp.org/files/imglnks/usimg/f/2/IMSLP16169-FledermausVScranz.pdf> [last accessed on March 14, 2024].

³ Cf. Thomas Siedhoff, *Handbuch des Musicals*, Mainz: Schott 2007, p. 676f.

⁴ In his compendium on musicals Thomas Siedhoff lists the musicals of the mentioned categories composed within the time period from 1866 up to 2007 p. 673-677.

⁵ Deutscher Bühnenverein (ed.), *Wer spielte was? 2021/22 Werkstatistik Deutschland | Österreich | Schweiz*, Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann 2022.

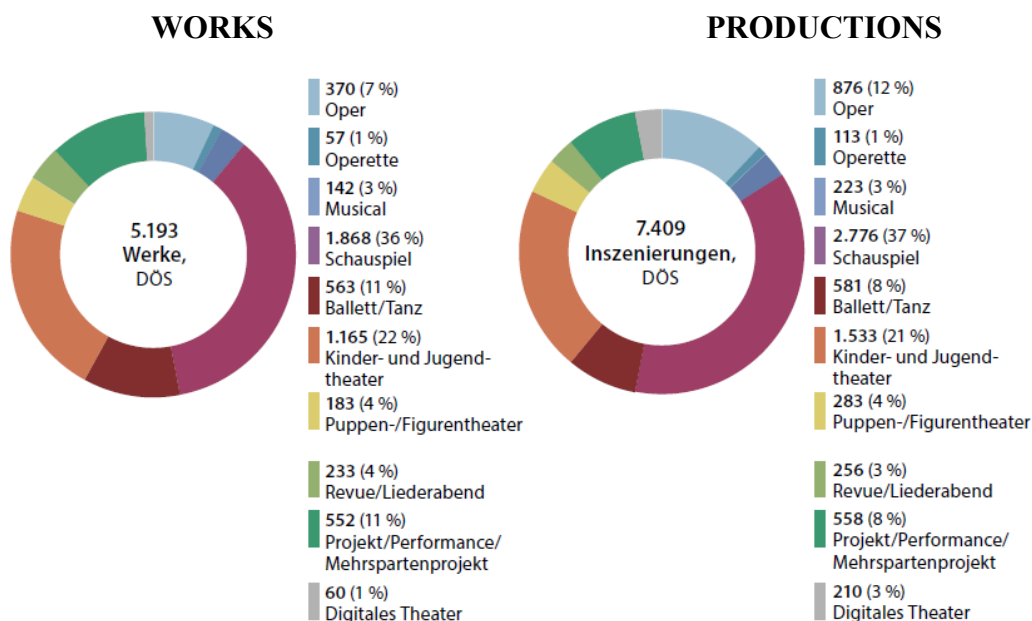
Special musical theatres were built on the continent, where the most famous musicals were performed en suite, with the matinees even eight times a week. Only a few opera houses and theatres with three branches could afford to acquire these hits. But the continental Europeans were more inclined to modify the appearance of the plays in so many closely placed theatres with communicating presentations and the fashion of director's theater. After the stakeholders of American and British musical hits allowed continental theatres stagings of their own, also smaller theatres could afford to present musical hits. Besides, a new and very lively scene of local productions emerged. The audience of musicals grew and surpassed the amount of spectators of many favorite operas and operettas.

Deutscher Bühnenverein regularly publishes the data of the seasons in Germany, Austria and Switzerland in *Wer spielte was?*⁶ The statistics of the last three years reveal the "Corona-shock" after the season 2018/2019. The lockdowns, reductions of performances and spectators in the season 2020/2021 reduced the amount of all theatre performances by 70% and the amount of spectators by 86% – the concrete numbers of digital theater spectators could not be calculated; the total of all the productions were: in 2018/2019: 8188 – in 2019/2020 already reduced: 7028 – and with the lockdowns in 2020/2021 almost half of pre-Corona: 4438.

To provide an insight into the recent development, the seasons struck by Corona are too special to be significant. Therefore the following statistics focus on the season 2021/2022. The data and diagrams are cited from *Wer spielte was? 2021/2022*, published in 2023 as e-book.

This season showed an increase of productions approaching pre-Corona normality. The amount of spectators – here: in German theaters only – rose from 2.541.142 in 2020/2021 to 12.820.418 in 2021/2022.

Works and Productions according to Genres Identified in Germany, Austria, Switzerland 2021/2022

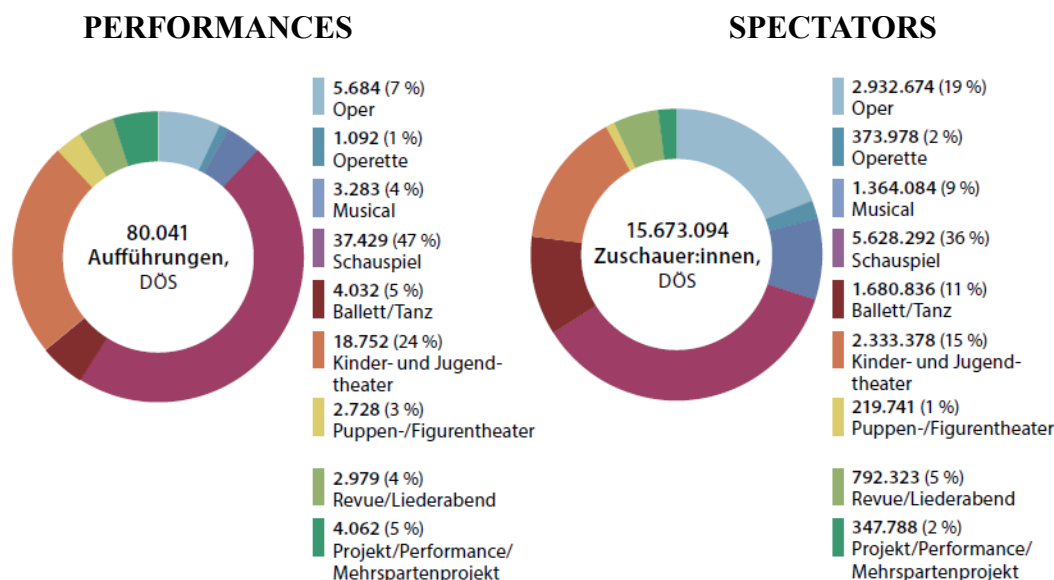


The diagram shows, that 3% of all works presented in theatres of the German speaking European countries during the season 2021/2022 have been musicals; yet the 4% of

⁶ Deutscher Bühnenverein (ed.), *Wer spielte was? 2018/2019* Werkstatistik Deutschland | Österreich | Schweiz, Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann 2020; *Wer spielte was? 2019/2020*, release 2021.

“Revue/Liederabend” [Recital] also contain adaptations of musical subjects or arrangements like jukebox compilations and portraits of famous musicians like Udo Jürgens’ *Merci, Cherie* arranged by Frank Buchwald. When Corona stopped the production of John Kander’s *Cabaret* at Dortmund Theater, Gil Mehmert arranged and staged the “Kit Kat Club” in the successful show *Berlin skandalös*.

The diagram of **Performances and Spectators According to Genres** identified in Germany, Austria, Switzerland 2021/2022 marks musicals and revues with 4% each. But 9% of the spectators chose musicals and 5% revues.



In the statistic of **Most Popular Composers of Music Theater** identified in Germany, Austria, Switzerland 2021/2022 the opera composers dominate the list of productions, because the big quantity of opera houses and theatres with three branches often stage new productions to keep up the audience’s interest, while in the special musical theatres the productions run for the longest time possible.

Productions			Performances			Spectators		
1	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	100	1	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	830	1	Giacomo Puccini	475.184
2	Giuseppe Verdi	84	2	Giuseppe Verdi	600	2	Giuseppe Verdi	418.705
3	Richard Wagner	70	3	Giacomo Puccini	485	3	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	383.865
4	Giacomo Puccini	66	4	Martin Lingnau	429	4	Richard Wagner	259.015
5	Richard Strauss	35	5	Andrew Lloyd Webber	345	5	Andrew Lloyd Webber	256.089
6	Gioachino Rossini	33	6	Helko Wohlgenuth	316	6	Martin Lingnau	148.106
6	Gaetano Donizetti	33	7	Richard Wagner	308	7	Gioachino Rossini	135.888
7	Georg Friedrich Handel	30	8	Franz Lehár	252	8	Alan Menken	121.372
8	Benjamin Britten	24	9	Gioachino Rossini	222	9	Georges Bizet	107.879
9	Franz Lehár	22	10	Gaetano Donizetti	221	10	Richard Strauss	107.569

In the list of performances the musical composers Lingnau, Webber and Wohlgenuth hold the places 4, 5 and 6.

In the list of spectators the musical composers Webber, Lingnau and Menken hold the places 5, 6 and 8.

The longest running Broadway musicals are by July 2023:
The Phantom of the Opera – *Chicago* – *The Lion King* – *Wicked* – *Cats* – *Les Misérables*.

Intendants carefully observe the spectators' preferences for calculating their repertoire, production calendar and budget. The statistic of 2021/2022 lists in the first 10 places six operas and four musicals. The first four musicals were played en suite, *Der König und ich* [*The King and I*] at Seefestspiele Mörbisch, but *Cabaret* in nine different theatres, and *Ein Käfig voller Narren* [*La Cage aux folles*] at Eutiner Festspiele and Vienna Volksoper.

Webber's *Starlight Express*, first performed in 1984, had in Bochum from 1988 – 2022 18 Million spectators.

Music theater works with the highest number of spectators in Germany, Austria, Switzerland⁷ [musicals are underlined]

	Title	Composer	Spectators
1	Madama Butterfly	Puccini	242.341
2	<u>Starlight Express</u>	Webber	203.173
3	Die Zauberflöte	Mozart	155.912
4	Heise Ecke	Lingnau, Wohlgemuth	105.973
5	<u>Sister Act</u>	Menken	105.109
6	Carmen	Bizet	98.720
7	Le nozze di Figaro	Mozart	92.788
8	<u>Der König und ich</u>	Rodgers	78.900
9	Il barbiere di Siviglia	Rossini	74.180
10	Hänsel und Gretel	Humperdinck	69.672
11	Tosca	Puccini	68.407
12	Nabucco	Verdi	64.628
13	La traviata	Verdi	60.094
14	Die Fledermaus	J. Strauss	55.939
15	Aida Giuseppe	Verdi	54.933
16	Die lustige Witwe	Lehár	48.914
17	Rigoletto	Verdi	45.621
18	Turandot	Puccini	44.803
19	Don Giovanni	Mozart	43.851
20	<u>Cabaret</u>	Kander	39.893
21	Lucia di Lammermoor	Donizetti	37.223
22	Im weissen Rössl	Benatzky	37.040
23	La bohème	Puccini	36.616
24	Don Carlos	Verdi	36.098
25	<u>Ein Käfig voller Narren</u>	Herman	35.937

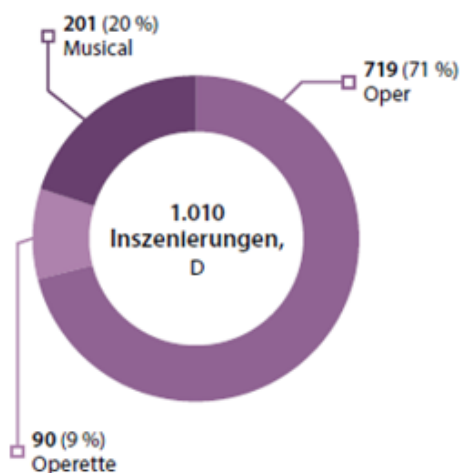
Recent trends show that many new musicals are composed to celebrate famous musicians, e.g. *Elvis* for Elvis Presley, *MJ* für Michael Jackson, *Tina* für Tina Turner, the Beatles in *Across the Universe*, Louis Armstrong's music in *A Wonderful World* and the songs of Buddy Holly in *Buddy – The Buddy Holly Story*. In the manner of jukebox or compilation musicals, favorite songs are arranged in a plot like songs of "Queen" in *We will rock you* and those of Udo Jürgens in *Ich war noch niemals in New York*.

The following diagram refers to productions and spectators only in Germany. It mentions musicals without regarding the related rates of the revues. In the list of productions operas dominate again because of the many theatres with new opera productions, while the special musical theatres stick to a single production.

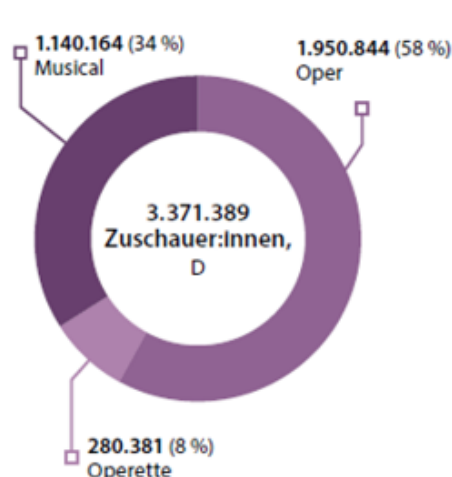
⁷ List in: Deutscher Bühnenverein (ed.), *Wer spielte was? 2021/22*, l.c.

Distribution of Music Theater Works according to Genres Identified in Germany 2021/2022

Productions



Spectators



Until late 19th century most of the works in music theatre repertoires were contemporary compositions. After the world wars and the brain drains caused by the dictators the restoration spirit of the post-war era favored a more traditional music theatre. The evolution of atonal and dodecaphonic composition techniques eliminated the audience's comfortable riding on the idiomatic flow of tonal harmony (Th. W. Adorno), and the composers of serialism even disparaged opera and similar music theatre.

Besides, movies and the popular music theatre provided current issues and entertainment. Ever since the music theatre, whose audience favors traditional works, struggles for its relevance as a medium of contemporary public discourses. A discrepancy emerged between the acceptance of new operas and the curiosity for new musicals.

The following statistic **Contemporary music theatre works with the highest amount of spectators 2021/2022** uses the item "contemporary" for more than 70 years: the earliest of the actual hits had its world premiere on 1951. In the list of contemporary music theatre works musicals hold the places from 1 to 9.

Composer/s	Title	world Premiere	Spectators 2021/2022
1. A. L. Webber	<i>Starlight Express</i>	1984	203.173
2. M. Lingnau, H. Wohlgemut	<i>Heiße Ecke (St. Pauli)</i>	2003	105.973
3. A. Menken	<i>Sister Act</i>	2006	105.109
4. R. Rodgers	<i>Der König und ich</i> <i>[The King and I]</i>	1951	78.900
5. J. Kander	<i>Cabaret</i>	1966	39.893
6. J. Herman	<i>Ein Käfig voller Narren</i> <i>[La cage aux folles]</i>	1983	35.937
7. F. Loewe	<i>My Fair Lady</i>	1956	34.440
8. T. Waits	<i>Black Rider</i>	1990	31.727
9. J. Du Prez, E. Idle, N. Innes	<i>Monthy Python's Spamalot</i>	2004	31.120
10. B. Britten	<i>Peter Grimes</i>	1954	25.959

Benjamin Britten's opera *Peter Grimes* of 1945 is on place 10, it was performed in 6 opera houses, among them the Bavarian and the Vienna states operas with Jonas Kauffmann as lead character.

In the lists of Deutscher Bühnenverein the performances of opera houses, theatres which perform the three branches of drama, music theatre and ballet appear together with those of special musical theatres, that perform a single musical en suite, every day, with matinees even eight times a week, while opera houses and theatres with three branches integrate musicals into their repertoire, often in semi stagione manner.

Special problems of staging musicals in theatres with three branches

- they try to use their resources,
- they avoid additional costs for singers, dancers, musicians and technicians,
- they choose musicals which can be cast with their own staff,
- operetta singers have to be capable of further vocal styles,
- the performances have to fit into the repertoire or semi-stagione system,
- they host creative theatre pedagogic projects with children or teenagers,
- only very few music theatres produce new pop or rock musicals.

On Broadway, in London West End and in special continental musical theatres the productions play en-suite, up to eight times a week, open-end and hope for long-running periods. The cast is highly individualized, for the phenotypes must fit in the topic, especially concerning people of colour. The performers are trained for singing, speaking, acting and dancing. Some musicals use acrobatics together with singing and dancing, for example *Tarzan* (Phil Collins, 2006), *Paramour* (Guy Dubuc, Marc Lessand, Andreas Carlsson, 2016) and *Cléopâtre, la dernière reine d'Égypte* (compilation of various music, 2009). To meet the demands of the score, the performers have to be capable of singing in different musical styles. The singers are accustomed to micro ports and a voice production for amplification and/or digital editing.

The vocal styles

Operetta and musicals of a similar style:

- (modified) belcanto
- stylistic devices of Verismo
- legitimate singing
- parlando
- speech song, sprechgesang

Popular music:

- “natural” vocalizing
- sprechgesang
- crooning

Songstyle of Brecht and Weill

Jazz:

- scat (improvised singing with meaningless syllables, onomatopoeia, imitation of instrumental phrases)
- shouting

Some musical composers do not accept operetta singers for the parts in their musicals, for example Sylvester Levay cancelled the production of his *Rebecca* in London, because he could not accept the offered operetta tenor for his Maxim de Winter.⁸

⁸ Information by Sylvester Levay 2011.

For some musicals crossovers of belcanto, legitimate singing, pop- and rock-vocals are demanded. For example in Frank Nimsgern *Phantasma*⁹ Michaela Kovarikova sang belcanto coloraturas in the part of Marionette (that recalled Olympia's aria in Jacques Offenbach's *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*), and in her part as Julia she sang belting and rock vocals.

Musicals with pop- and rock-vocals use:

Legitimate singing – clear phonation with flat resonance.

Crossover of belcanto and pop-/rock-vocals with sprechgesang, legitimate singing, crooning, belting, shouting, screaming.

Rock vocals: „powervoice“, „screaming voices“,

guttural singing with amplifiers and digital sound editing:

- crooning: soft, aspirated sound
- belting: clarion, reedy sound
- shouting: exclaiming
- screaming: high outcries
- grunting: deep guttural sound
- growling: low grunting

Ethnic vocal styles

Beatboxing

Digital performance: editing of vocal sounds.

The phonation of the „powervoice“ of rock music differs as a screaming voice most significantly from the singing voices.¹⁰

Screaming impress with high outcries especially of male voices. Grunting produces deep guttural sounds which in Musicals is used for criminals or monsters. Frank Wildhorn's Mr. Hyde in *Jekyll & Hyde* demonstrates the ambivalence of the doctor and the monster in "The confrontation" by switching from legitimate to grunting. The even lower growling of death metal characterized the Death in the rock musical *Jedermann [Everyman]*.¹¹

Exoticisms may demand ethnic vocal styles. The multiple voices of beatboxing techniques will probably soon enter the musical stage.

Further special features of musical productions are their orchestras and bands. When opera houses and theatres with three branches perform musicals, those musicians of opera orchestras who lack competence of the demanded different musical styles cannot be employed, what causes further expenses.

For more recent musicals opera houses engage special musicians or bands who are familiar with jazz elements, pop- and rock sounds.

Some of these musicians play different instruments.

In more recent musicals the string section plays underscoring, and the winds dominate.

⁹ *Phantasma*, music: Frank Nimsgern, libretto: Aino Laos, Elmar Ottenthal, world premiere: November 7, 2009, Staatstheater Saarbrücken.

¹⁰ For singing versus screaming voices see: Winkler, Hartmut; Bergermann, Ulrike, *Singende Maschinen und resonierende Körper. Zur Wechselbeziehung von Progression und Regression in der Popmusik*, <https://homepages.uni-paderborn.de/winkler/Winkler--Bergermann--Singende-Maschinen-und-resonierende-Körper.pdf> [last accessed on March 14, 2024]. For the categories of vocal techniques see: Léothaud, Gilles and Bernard Lortat-Jacob, Hugo Zemp in collaboration with Trần Quang Hai and Jean Schwarz. 1996. *Les voix du monde. Une Anthologie des Expressions Vocales – Voices of the World. An Anthology of Vocal Expression*, Musée de l'Homme, Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle, Paris; Vill, Susanne, "Floating in the Universe of the Voice – Power and the Variety of Vocal Expression", in: *Journal of Theatre Anthropology*, No. 1, 2024, Mimesis Edizioni Milano.

¹¹ *Jedermann [Everyman]*, A Rock Mystery, music: Günter Werno, Andy Kuntz, Stephan Lill, book: Andy Kuntz based on an English morality play of the 15th century and Hugo von Hofmannsthal's play, world premiere April 10, 2015, Pfalztheater Kaiserslautern.

The rhythm section produces permanent beats of the percussion and e-bass.
 The singers and the bands use audio editors and amplifiers.
 Musicals work with less musicians in the pit, often with bands on stage.

The following examples of famous Broadway productions came up with 16 to 22 musicians, what shows the big the difference between musical bands and opera orchestras of about 100 musicians:

1975 Marvin Hamlisch's *A Chorus Line* with 16 musicians in The Public Theatre NYC (1.032 seats).
 1987 Stephen Sondheim's *Into the Woods* with 20 musicians in the Martin Beck Theatre NYC (1.215 seats)
 2007 Stephen Schwarz *Wicked* with 22 musicians in the George Gershwin Theater NYC (1.940 seats).¹²

In 2003 the American Federation of Musicians struck against the League of American Theatres and Producers and achieved a guaranty of 18 or 19 musicians minimum depending on the theatre's available seats.

The jukebox musical *Tina*, featuring life, music and career of Tina Turner, started in 2018 at the Aldwych Theatre in London, turned to Broadway and Hamburg in 2019, Utrecht, Madrid, a North America Tour, Sydney and Stuttgart followed from 2020 to 2023.

At Lunt-Fontane Theatre, NYC, 14 singers/ dancers performed on stage and 11 musicians in the band.¹³



The Hamburg production had 13 musicians and a conductor:
 1 percussion/ on stage drums
 1 on stage bass
 4 guitars
 2 trumpets/ Flügelhorns
 1 tenor-/ bass trombone
 1 drums/ percussion
 1 bass – 1 Keyboard
 1 alt, tenor, bass sax.¹⁴

Photo © Morris Matzen; Ralf Brinkhoff/ Birgit Mögenburg, Stage Entertainment
Tina Souvenir programme 2019

¹² Cf. Thomas Siedhoff, "Was ist Musical?", Arbeitsmanuskript der 2. Auflage von *Handbuch des Musicals*, „Music in the Pit: Zum Musicalorchester“, vom Autor an SV gegeben.

¹³ 11 musicians for drums, percussion, two guitars, bass, two keyboards alternating with conducting, one player for alto sax and tenor sax, one for tenor sax and bari sax, one for trumpet and Flügelhorn and one trombone: Rocky Bryant, drums; Yuri Yamashita, percussion; Sherrod Barnes, guitar; Aurélien Budynek, guitar; Winston Roye, bass; Alvin Hough jr., conductor and keyboard 1; John Yun, associate conductor and keyboard 2; Kristy Norter, alto sax and tenor sax; David Mann, tenor sax and bari sax; John Walsh, trumpet and Flügelhorn; Sara Jacovino, trombone. <https://www.broadwaymusicians.com/tina> [last accessed on March 14, 2024].

¹⁴ On the photo of the programme book: Back line: Florian Bronk: Percussion/ On Stage Drums – Jochen Bens: Gitarre – Matthias Strass: Gitarre – Uli Kringler: Gitarre – Kai Eppler: Trompete/ Flügelhorn – Michael Leuschner: Trompete/ Flügelhorn – Andreas Deichmann: Tenor-/ Bassposaune, Front line: Joan Damian Martinez: On-Stage Bass – Claus Hofrichter: Gitarre – Helge Teschner: Drums/ Percussion – Frerk Schulz-Klein: Bass – Art Brauer: Keyboard 1 – Helge Rügert: Alt, Tenor, Basssaxophon.

Digital Sound Production

Composers of new musicals often work with digital sound software because of the amazing offer of various sounds. Often they also cannot afford the costs of an orchestra to perform their score for a recording that they could use for the performances. They create the composition with their own equipment or a digital studio with sound software and databases e.g. the *Vienna symphonic library* (VSL), soundboards and sample players, archives of samples (musicradar.com actually offers 92.161 free sample downloads)¹⁵, instrumental audio samples in the styles: orchestral, ethnic, alternative, laid back, hip hop, pop, rock, swing, urban, RnB, Lo-Fi (funk), electronic, feel good, up beat, groove, alternative pop, acoustic, ambient. They also use archives of beats and loops, furthermore “atmo”: background noises (nature-, industry-sounds etc.). The composition with these immense databases requires a profound competence concerning the qualities of the sounds and their mixing ratio.

A music notation software edits the score. Instrumental accompaniments for songs and/or choirs can be delivered as sound data on USB stick or CD.

Accompanying vocals are recorded in a studio, amplified and blended into the sound.

Live audio editing can use harmonizers, vocoders, amplifiers, subwoofers and sub lows.

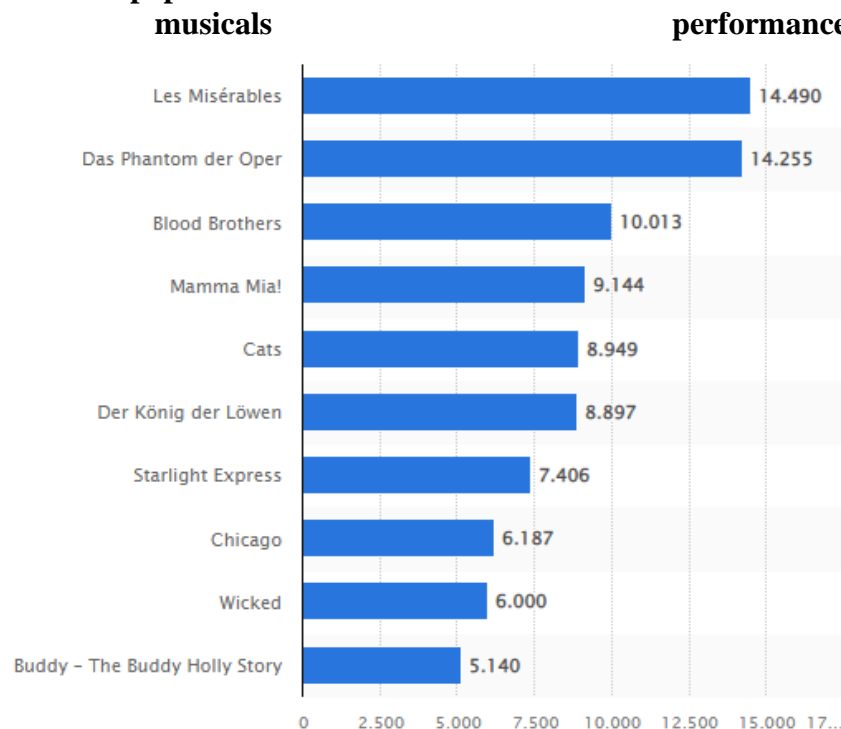
If necessary, playbacks and half-playbacks may be employed.

To achieve an immersion for the spectators the auditorium is equipped with loudspeakers and surround sound technique.

For the stage performance the ELA technicians have to start and play the audio files into the flow of the stage actions. In opera houses and non specialized theatres often the sound systems are not available which in musicals produce the sound architecture for immersion.

In many countries of the world musicals attract spectators who even pay high ticket prices for their entertainment.

The most popular musicals – effective date of the statistics: July 2022¹⁶



¹⁵ Free music samples: download loops, hits and multis from SampleRadar, 92.161 free sample downloads (A to Z): <https://www.musicradar.com/news/tech/free-music-samples-royalty-free-loops-hits-and-multis-to-download> [last accessed on March 14, 2024].

¹⁶ <https://de.statista.com/themen/4770/musicals/#topicOverview> [last access on 10.06.2023]

Spectators of musicals by November 28, 2022:¹⁷

on Broadway	11.700.000
In London West End	9.300.000
In German Theatres	122.432

Ticket prizes and preferences of the audience

Spectators of musicals are accustomed to pay rather high ticket prices. Actually the price of a ticket to a Broadway show in the bigger theatres is from about 50 up to about 300 \$, e.g. 338 \$ for an Orchestra Center seat in the Lyric Theatre New York for *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*).¹⁸

The commercial basis of the popular theater demands a certain pandering to the public. Many musicals serve the expectation to see beauty, astonishing entertainment and to feel relaxation, joy, hope and empowerment for the challenges of life. Even so, many of the very popular musicals also treat rather serious political and social problems and dare to expose rough conflicts in fierce attacks. They accuse political mischiefs, abuse of power, conspiracy and corruption, and they prove to be woke alert to racist, sexist and social prejudice and discrimination.

A documentation of first performances of musicals in the German speaking countries of Europe 1945 – 2020 in chronological, alphabetical and regional order for Germany, DDR, Austria and Switzerland offers Deutsches Musicalarchiv.¹⁹

Favorites and Shockers

The following chapter treats popular musicals which are mentioned in the above statistics and further examples of musicals with outstanding social and political themes in chronological order.

Accusations of discriminations of colored people or different ethnic groups often appear in musicals. Already in 1927 Jerome Kern's *Show boat*²⁰ cast black people for the workers who carry the cotton bales onto the ship. In his song "Ol man river" Joe complained: "Dark people work while de white people play [...] We sweat and strain, Body all aching, and wracked with pain".²¹ The musical also opposed racial classification by the law against miscegenation. The show boat's star singer Julie has to leave the ship after a sheriff accused her as a mulatto being married to a white man. Julie sank into alcoholism and unemployment.

With the plot of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* Leonard Bernstein stressed the enmity of white New Yorkers versus immigrants of Puerto Rico in his *West Side Story* (1957).²² Dance events like the "Dance at the Gym" were arranged attempting to peace the hostility, but the gangs of the "Jets" and the "Sharks" preferred to "stick to their own kind". The Puerto Ricans start a song "Puerto Rico, you lovely island" but continue sarcastically itemizing the miseries of this "ugly island", and sum up their discriminations in New York in "I like to be in

¹⁷ <https://de.statista.com/themen/4770/musicals/#topicOverview>, published by L. Graefe [last access on 10.06.2023]

¹⁸ <https://www.hellotickets.com/us/new-york/theatre/harry-potter-and-the-cursed-child-tickets/2024-03-16,1900/1912600/2> [last accessed on March 14, 2024].

¹⁹ *Musicallexikon*, edited by Wolfgang Jansen and Klaus Baberg together with *Musicalarchiv* at *Zentrum für populäre Kultur und Musik der Universität Freiburg*, <https://www.deutsches-musicalarchiv.de> [last accessed on March 14, 2024].

²⁰ *Show Boat*, music: Jerome Kern, book, text: Oscar Hammerstein II based on Edna Ferber's novel of the same title, lyrics: Paul Robeson, word premiere: December 27, 1927, Ziegfeld Theatre – New York City.

²¹ Songtext: <https://www.songtexte.com/songtext/paul-robesson/ol-man-river-7b830a94.html> [last accessed on March 14, 2024]

²² *West Side Story*, music: Leonard Bernstein, concept: Jerome Robbins, lyrics: Stephen Sondheim, book: Arthur Laurents, based on William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, world premiere September 26, 1957, Winter Garden Theatre New York.

America". The fierce struggles escalate when Tony's love for Maria proves to be intolerable for the opponent gangs. Chino, a friend of Maria's brother, snipes at Tony. The gangs stand in shock. Maria accuses the rowdies of murder.

In John Kander's *Cabaret* (1966)²³ the English novelist Cliff meets Sally, a singer/dancer at the "Kit-Kat-Klub". The musical shows the precarious conditions of the artist's way of living beyond the glamour of the "roaring twenties" in Berlin. When Sally, neglected child of a mostly absent diplomat, became pregnant, she chose an abortion instead of accepting Cliff's offer to share his scholarly life in Oxford. The show goes on, while the cabaret's audience gradually fills with Nazis. The Conférencier presents a costumed monkey and sings "If You Could See Her through My Eyes" ending with "she wouldn't look Jewish at all". The riots of the national socialist mob increases. As a demonstration of "völkische" music against the so-called "degenerated" art a group of "Hitlerjugend"-boys sing "Tomorrow Belongs to Me". Sally's passionate love affair with Cliff is contrasted with the gentle love story of the Jewish fruit dealer Isaak Schulz and Miss Schneider, owner of the boarding house, a modest lodging for Sally, Cliff, a prostitute and further obscure characters. Mr. Schulz proposed marriage to Miss Schneider, but when after the Nazis' election victory the riots damaged his shop, he leaves her to prevent her from besetment.

Only one decade after the end of world war II the Vietnam war started and lasted for 20 years. In the 1960s the people were warworn, movements of protest against the "establishment" and against the government's power of induction arose, thousands of young Americans fled abroad to escape from fighting and dying in Vietnam. The constrictions of the authoritarian conventions led to a radical call for freedom. The hippie subculture celebrated the new liberties of the sexual revolution. The change of convictions in different parts of the society manifested the new spirit in the peace movement and the black civil rights movement.

Musicals came up with anti-war appeals, prominently Galt MacDermot's *Hair* (1968)²⁴ shocked the conservatives with its treatment of illegal drugs, sexuality and the irreverence for political symbols. The plot tells the story of Claude, a young man from the country who meets a group of nonconformists who introduce him to their alternative lifestyle of drugs, open sexuality, nonviolence and peace. When Claude received his conscription into the army he has to decide whether he should refuse to perform military service, like his friends had resisted the draft risking to be imprisoned, or if he should risk his life and kill people by serving in Vietnam. Claude cannot resist the moral pressure and is killed in Vietnam. – The songs "Aquarius" and "The Flesh Failures" with the refrain "Let the Sunshine In" from *Hair* became anthems of the anti-Vietnam war peace movement.²⁵

Still during the Vietnam war Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1971)²⁶ started its triumphal reception – at that time also functioning as a reminder of Christian love and a scare campaign against killing innocent people. Tim Rice's book of the rock opera emphasized the political aspect, that the Jews expected their "Messiah" to free them from Roman occupation. Judas represented this position and became an ideological antagonist of

²³ *Cabaret*, music: John Kander, book: Joe Masteroff, lyrics: Fred Ebb, based on John van Druten's *I Am a Camera* and Christopher Isherwood's *Goodbye Berlin*, world premiere: November 20, 1966, Bradhurst Theatre New York.

²⁴ *Hair - The American Tribal Love-Rock Musical*, music: Galt MacDermot, book, lyrics: Gerome Ragni, James Rado, world premiere: April 29, 1968, Biltmore Theatre New York.

²⁵ Galt Mac Dermot, *Hair*, songs: "Aquarius" and "The Flesh Failures" with the refrain "Let the Sunshine In", Writers: James Rado, Gerome Ragni, Galt Macdermot, lyrics powered by www.musixmatch.com, <https://www.songtexte.com/songtext/hair/the-flesh-failures-let-the-sunshine-in-134b8de5.html>; see also: Anne Meisenzahl, Roger Peace, *Protest Music of the Vietnam War*, <https://peacehistory-usfp.org/protest-music-vietnam-war/> [last accessed on March 14, 2024].

²⁶ *Jesus Christ Superstar*, music: Andrew Lloyd Webber, book, lyrics: Tim Rice, world premiere: October 12, 1971, Mark Hellinger Theater in New York City.

Jesus. So, Judas' suicide proved to be a result of his despair. In *Gethsemane* Rice and Webber created a heartbreaking song for Jesus' conflict with his father who imposed upon him the duty to die. The rock music's traditional focus on criticism and protest against social injustice enhanced the appeal on the political themes of the subject.

Crime stories are popular for their thrill, and since Al Capone's lifetime Chicago is the capital famous for crime. In 1975 John Kander, Fred Ebb and Bob Fosse placed their musical *Chicago*²⁷ in this location. On the cases of two murderesses in jail they demonstrated how prisoners lie and cheat for their benefit, how corrupt jail guards and lawyers can be, how the press hypes whatever and whoever may attract attention despite their ethical and moral character, how even murderesses can become celebrated show stars acclaimed by a thoughtless audience.

Eva Perón, illegitimate child of the land baron Juan Duarte, is the protagonist of Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical *Evita* (1978).²⁸ The ambitious parvenue overcame her bastardy by exploiting her lovers' helpfulness, gained publicity as a mannequin and an actress and topped her social advancement as a radio host who yielded the attention of politicians. With a subtle propaganda she supported Perón's campaign. The musical shows her calculation and expediency, when she expels Juan Perón's mistress from his bed in order to take over her place. It demonstrates distorted competitions of political candidates, manipulations of the people through propaganda, corruptibility of candidates through media power and sex, the success of an uneducated woman sleeping her way up to the position of the Argentinian First Lady. After Juan Peron's election she addresses the people with her "Don't cry for me Argentina", a sentimental appeal to emotional affection. Hoping to achieve forgiveness for her failures and to alleviate the effects of the people's moral condemnation of her opportunistic lifestyle, she acts out a veracity and claims for compassion with her "wild days", her "mad existence", which inevitably forced her to develop ambitions for her social advancement. In Che Guevara (who in reality never met Eva Perón) the musical presents an antagonist who stresses the contempt of the feudal aristocrats, the male chauvinism of the Argentinian military, who requires a social commitment and who criticizes her deceitful charity. The overwhelming theatricality of the Argentinian's mourning at Evita's funeral displays the fatality of emotional enticement that may whitewash lacking socio-political efficiency.

Claude-Michel Schoenberg's *Les Misérables* (1980)²⁹ in Alain Boublil's adaptation of Victor Hugo's novel of 1862, is headed as the most popular musical in the statista.com issue. The musical has been translated into 21 languages. It treats the struggle of Jean Valjean who after stealing bread for his hungry nephew was imprisoned, dominated and exploited by the fanatic police inspector Javert, who pursues him even after his release. With strong scenes of the suffering prisoners, factory workers, single mothers and juvenile political revolvers at the February Revolution 1848 in Paris the musical showcases injustice, arbitrariness of officials, and the misery of the poor in confrontation with the privileged upper class and their executive.

Even among the funny and adventurous cats of Webber's musical *Cats* (1981)³⁰ there is a claim for empathy and compassion with a depleted person who lost her vital energy and joy at

²⁷ *Chicago*, music: John Kander, book: Fred Ebb, Bob Fosse based on Maurine Dallas Watkins' play of the same name (1926), lyrics: Fred Ebb, world premiere: June 3, 1975, 46th Street Theatre, New York.

²⁸ *Evita*, music: Andrew Lloyd Webber, book, lyrics: Tim Rice based on the life of Eva Perón, world premiere: June 21, 1978, Price Edward Theatre London,

²⁹ *Les Misérables*, music: Claude-Michel Schönberg, book, lyrics: Alain Boublil based on Victor Hugo's novel of the same name, world premiere: September 17, 1980, Palais des Sports, Paris.

³⁰ *Cats*, music: Andrew Lloyd Webber, book: T. S. Eliot (poems from *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*) and Trevor Nunn, world premiere: May 11, 1981, New London Theatre.

the end of a life full of celebrity, glamour and fame. At the end of her series of nine lives the old former star³¹ and now disenchanted Grizzabella sings her nostalgic “Memory” what proves her to be worthy of ascending to the cat’s heaven.

Consequences of the inequality of social classes is Willy Russel’s subject in *Blood Brothers* (1983).³² The musical’s plot put the nature versus nurture debate up in discussion, whether human beings are influenced primarily by their genetic inheritance or by the environment of their development.

Poverty forced the mother of twins to give one child away, Eddie, who then grew up benefited by a wealthy, generous family, while his brother Mickey committed crimes and robbery trying to escape from his family’s misery. Despite their separation the twins met and struck up a blood brotherhood. Eddie became a councilor. The unemployed Mickey got in prison, becomes depressed and addicted to drugs. Mental diseases like Mickey’s depression and the mental derangement and paranoia of Eddie’s adoptive mother appear as results of the muddled family background. Free again, Mickey, as well as his brother, fell in love with Linda, whom he married after she got pregnant. When both mothers revealed that the boys are twins, Mickey complained to have missed the chance of his brother’s better life. In a jealous outburst Mickey threatened Eddie with a gun, and a random shot killed Eddie. Then the police’s shot killed Mickey. – In an alternative ending Eddie’s adoptive mother attempted to shoot Mickey in order to save Eddie as her own child. But Eddie jumped between them and caught the bullet. Her next shot killed Mickey.

Andrew Lloyd Webber’s *The Phantom of the Opera* (1986)³³ shapes the ambivalent fascination of beauty and monstrosity, a subject that Alan Menken took up in *The Beauty and the Beast* (1993) and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1999). They expose the pain of an outcast by physical deformation and his desperate attempts to realize his creativity. The plead for social acceptance of the handicapped as a moral commitment is confronted with the brutality and arbitrariness of the phantom’s terror.

Webber treats the story of a deformed boy who, growing up, created his special living environment in the underground of the Paris opera house. Gaining more and more power by terrorizing the directors of the opera, he imposed his aesthetics on their choice of works and on the cast. After he got hold of the ballet girl Christine in his underground, he taught her singing. In order to sponsor her opera debut as a substitute he sickened the Prima donna, and he even killed established opponents. In his jealousy he also threatened Christina’s lover Raoul. Pursued by the police he mysteriously escaped.

Webber’s musical *Love never dies* (2010)³⁴ still intensifies the ambivalence of beauty and monstrosity. The phantom escaped to Coney Island where he built a show of monsters on the pleasure ground. Merchandising the attraction of physically deformed people for the audience’s curiosity, ambivalent between disgust and pity, was Phineas Taylor Barnum’s

³¹ In 1993 Webber again treated the subject of an aging former star in *Sunset Boulevard*, book: Don Black, Christopher Hampton based on Billy Wilder’s film of the same name, world premiere: July 12, 1993, Adelphi Theatre London. The main character of the musical is a faded movie star who lives under the delusion of her lost glamour, unable to accept the loss of her celebrity.

³² *Blood Brothers* (1983), music, book, lyrics: Willy Russel, tryouts: November 1981, Liverpool, world premiere April 4, 1983, Lyric Theatre, London.

³³ *The Phantom of the Opera*, music: Andrew Lloyd Webber, book: Lloyd Webber, Richard Stilgoe, based on Gaston Leroux’ novel of the same name (1910), lyrics: Charles Hart, Richard Stilgoe, world premiere: October 9: 1986, His Majesty’s Theatre, London.

³⁴ *Love Never Dies*, book: Andrew Lloyd Webber, Glenn Slater, Ben Elton, based on Frederick Forsyth’s novel *The Phantom of Manhattan* (1999), lyrics: Glenn Slater, Charles Hart, world premiere: March 9, 2010, Adelphi Theatre London.

recipe for success, when he founded the *Barnum & Bailey Circus* 1919 in New York.³⁵ The libretto of Webber's musical, created in collaboration with Ben Elton, Frederick Forsyth and Glenn Slater, adopted characters of Gaston Leroux' novel *Phantom of the Opera* and functions as a sequel to proceed the story of the phantom's relation with Christine.

She came to New York with her husband Raoul and her son Gustave, engaged for her American debut by Oscar Hammerstein I. The phantom, incognito, invited her for a performance of one of his compositions. After he discovered to be the father of her son, the phantom tried to teach the child to see the "beauty underneath" the ugly surface of the monsters in his exhibition. The troubles of hostility between Raoul and the phantom as well as those between Christine and her former friend Meg Giry escalate. Meg, hopelessly in love with the phantom, tried to shoot herself, the phantom interfered, and she shot fatally injured Christine. Left alone with his son, the phantom reveals his deformed face, and Gustave shows no fright.

In 1853 gunboats of a US naval squadron landed in Japan to force the isolated country to open its ports for trade. In 1904 Giacomo Puccini composed his opera *Madama Butterfly* about the story of an American Marine Officer, who utilized the Japanese convention to marry a woman whom he could easily desert. But the geisha hoped to achieve American freedom for herself and her child. Disillusioned she commits seppuku. For *Miss Saigon* (1989)³⁶ Claude-Michel Schoenberg and Alain Boublil transferred the plot to the end of the Vietnam war and replaced the geisha Cio-Cio-San with the war orphan Kim, who earned her living as a bar maid among prostitutes. The GI Chris fell in love with her. In the sudden decampment of the US-soldiers from Saigon he had to leave her behind. Pregnant with his child, she had to face the Vietcong's invasion and the threat of her former fiancé, whom she killed to save her child. Years later, American soldiers searched for their Vietnamese children, called "Bui-Doi" ("the dust of life").³⁷ They found Kim with her son. But then Chris was married and only wanted his son. Kim committed suicide to provide a chance for a better life for her son. – With the recent war, the American's guilt for the Napalm bombs that killed Kim's family, the soldier's stampede from Saigon, the threat of the cruel Vietcong, Kim's flight with the boatpeople to Bangkok and the mass of abandoned "Bui-Doi" Schoenberg's *Miss Saigon* unfolds so many disastrous consequences of the Vietnam war, which dismay the audience with a strong anti-war invocation.

Political assassinations became the subject of Stephen Sondheim's and John Weidman's musical *Assassins* (1990).³⁸ The title associates the Nizari Isma'ili order of the "assassins" (1090-1275) in middle east.³⁹ But for the musical Sondheim and Weidmann chose as their

³⁵ Michael Gracey's biographical musical drama film *The Greatest Showman* (2017), screenplay by Jenny Bicks and Bill Condon on a story by Bicks, with nine songs of Benj Pasek and Justin Paul and a score by John Debney and Joseph Trapanese, is based on the story and life of P.T. Barnum, a famous showman and entertainer.

³⁶ *Miss Saigon*, music: Claude-Michel Schoenberg, book: Alain Boublil, lyrics: Alain Boublil, Richard Maltby Jr., world premiere: September 20, 1989, Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, London.

³⁷ *Miss Saigon* Script - Dialogue Transcript, Entracte: BUI-DOI. (In September 1978 JOHN is addressing a conference in Atlanta that CHRIS and his wife ELLEN are attending at JOHN'S request.) Choir: "They're called bui-doi / the dust of life / conceived in hell / and born in strife / they are the living reminders / of all the good we failed to do / we can't forget / must not forget / that they are all our children too."

³⁸ *Assassins*, music, lyrics: Stephen Sondheim, book: John Weidman, based on a concept by Charles Gilbert Jr., world premiere: December 18, 1990, Playwrights Horizons, New York.

³⁹ The congregation was founded by Hasan-i Sabbah. In order to expand the dominion of the Isma'ili state the colluders of the "assassins" killed the leaders of Muslim and Christian Crusaders whom they considered enemies. Defeated by the Mongols, the "assassins" went underground. Cf. <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assassinen> [last accessed on March 14, 2024]. Still in 1964 the Ismaili community in Syria is assumed to hold 56.000 persons. Cf. Heinz Halm, *Die Assassinen. Geschichte eines islamischen Geheimbundes* (= C.H. Beck Wissen 2868). C. H. Beck, München 2017 – The video game "Assassin's Creed" (since 2007) displays the "assassins" as a secret society that exists since the Crusades, fights against the

subject those men and women who attempted to assassinate presidents of the United States,⁴⁰ and they invented a shooting gallery on a fairground where these assassins, like in a revue, appeared to explain their murderous attacks. Their ‘justifications’ revealed objections against the particular presidents’ policies. Transferring the historic reality of the assassination attempts to a double gaming situation – the fairground and the theatre performance – enframed the killing attacks with a surreal fiction in order to invite the spectators to comprehend some of their political motives. On the other hand, the gamification of a violent felony could also appear as an impermissible treatment in a theatrical presentation that may leave the moral judgement of the facts to the spectators.

The Austrian empress Elisabeth was admired as one of the most beautiful aristocrats of the 19th century. In the 1950s Ernst Marischka’s *Sissi*-trilogy⁴¹ promoted the current myths about the capricious empress which overlapped the historical truth till the diligent research of historians⁴² also revealed the problematic traits of her character. Michael Kunze assembled some of them in his libretto for Sylvester Levay’s composition of *Elisabeth* (1992).⁴³ The prologue exposes the decadence of the Habsburg empire at the end of the 19th century. The anarchist assassin Luigi Lucheni claims only to have obeyed the order of Death who aimed for Elisabeth as his beloved. The empress’ affinity to death appears in her early downfall, her daughter’s and her son’s death and in many indices of morbidity in her poetry. The musical also disenchants her by displaying her egocentricity in her song “I belong to me” (in Act I, repeated in Act II), her selfish obsession with beauty, when she bathes in milk while the children of her people die with hunger. On her long and far trips she ignores her duties as empress and her suffering son’s distress. The musical also exposes her husband’s ruthlessness in his infidelity, love affairs and visits to brothels. The cruelty of the court is revealed, when stepmother Sophie organizes Elisabeth’s infection with syphilis in order to stop her political influence on the emperor’s decisions.

Compassion with people who face extreme challenges may be excited by Frank Wildhorn’s *Jekyll & Hyde* (1997).⁴⁴ Dr. Jekyll desperately tried save his father’s life. He believed that the evil in his fathers’ soul caused his comatose illness, and for eliminating the influence of the evil he must separate it from the good. Hoping to find the reason for the ambivalence of good and evil in the human psyche, he searched for a drug to separate the good from the evil in human nature. Since the code of ethics forbid experiments with human patients, self-experiments as tryouts of new combinations of chemical agents belonged to the adventures of scientific progress. Searching for a proper medicine, Dr. Jekyll got caught up in

“Templers” and is active until today. Cf. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assassin%27s_Creed [last access: March 14, 2024].

⁴⁰ Presidents assassinated: Abaham Lincoln, James A. Garfield, William McKinley, John F. Kennedy; Presidents wounded: Theodore Roosevelt, Ronald Reagan; Assassination attempts and plots: Andrew Jackson, Abraham Lincoln, William Howard Taft, Herbert Hoover, Franklin D. Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, Richard Nixon, Gerald D. Ford, Jimmy Carter, George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George Bush, Barack Obama, Donald Trump, Joe Biden. Deaths rumored to have been assassinations: Zachary Taylor, Warren G. Harding. Cf. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_United_States_presidential_assassination_attempts_and_plots [last accessed on March 14, 2024].

⁴¹ Ernst Marischka’s *Sissi*-trilogy, based on Marie Blank-Eismann’s novel (1952): *Sissi* (1955), *Sissi die junge Kaiserin* (1956), *Sissi – Schicksalsjahre einer Kaiserin* (1957).

⁴² E. g. Gabriele Praschl-Bichler, *Kaiserin Elisabeth. Mythos und Wahrheit*, Wien: Ueberreuter Verlag 1996. Martha Schad, *Elisabeth von Österreich*, München: Dtv 5/1998. Brigitte Hamann, *Elisabeth. Kaiserin wider Willen*, München: Piper, 2004.

⁴³ *Elisabeth*, music: Sylvester Levay, book: Michael Kunze, world premiere: September 3, 1992, Theater an der Wien, Wien.

⁴⁴ *Jekyll & Hyde*, music: Frank Wildhorn, book, lyrics: Leslie Bricusse, adapted from Robert Louis Stevenson’s *The strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), world premiere: April 28, 1997, Plymouth Theatre, New York.

the maelstrom of a fatal addiction. The drug evoked in him a criminal aggression, which he rioted out as Mr. Hyde in sadistic violations of a prostitute and murdering his opponents. After such excesses, returning to his former identity by use of an antidote became difficult, harder and fateful. Confronted with the true love of his fiancée, Dr. Jekyll realized how the power of his evil traits took over till he felt forced to commit suicide.

Even one of the longest running family entertainment musicals, *The Lion King* (1997)⁴⁵ by John Elton, Tim Rice, Roger Allers and Irene Mecchi, includes a serious accusation of a crime. Struggles for the proper regency are prevalent in many cultures of the world. As one of the oldest chronicles, the Vedas tell in *Mahabharata* about the dynastic struggle of two collateral branches of the family, the Kaurava and the Pandava, who both claim the right to inherit the throne of Hastinapura. The musical *The Lion King* follows Shakespeare's *Hamlet* with an ambitious brother of the ruling king, who kills the sovereign, usurps the throne and sends the prince afar, hoping him to die. In the musical Scar kills Mufasa and talks Simba into believing himself to be guilty of his father's death. Young Simba errs around in the wilderness, while Scar's terror ruins the basis of all animals' life in the realm. Grown up, Simba strives against Scar and kills him. The animals acknowledge Simba as the new lion king, and with Nala as queen, he presents their newborn son.

A combination of accusing antisemitism and corruption of the justice is the subject of Jason Robert Brown's and Alfred Uhry's musical *Parade* (1998).⁴⁶ The plot tells of a Yankee Jewish factory manager who had moved his plant to Georgia, where he was accused and convicted to have raped and murdered a girl of his employees. At first the police suspected the factory's African-American night guard, but after a press campaign in the north a retrial changed the sentence to a lifelong imprisonment. The really guilty and African-American domestics asked, how the lawsuit would have ended, if the victim had been black. A group of masked men – like Ku Klux Klan – kidnapped the Jew and lynched him.

Musicals are made for entertainment, and they mirror the living conditions of their contemporary environment. Many items of the rich and expanding repertoire display comedies of easy living like ABBA's *Mamma mia!* (1999).⁴⁷ But even this happy story of Donna, a single mother, who prepares her daughter's wedding, also tells about their hard earning a living by running a dilapidated hotel on a Greek island. In Donna's diary her daughter Sophie found the names of three possible fathers and invited them to the wedding. Each of them wants to guide his possible daughter to church, but after all she decides to postpone the marriage. Donna utilizes the presence of her former bandmates to celebrate a comeback of their trio with the song "Dancing Queen".

A dystopic vision of a capitalistic society devoted to consumerism is what the rock band Queen unfolds on Ben Elton's book in the jukebox musical *We will rock you* (2002).⁴⁸ In an 'Orwellian' world of a far off future, the iPlanet is controlled by the so called Globalsoft Corporations that eliminated individualistic efforts and established a mainstream conformity among their Ga Ga customers, who are fed by the music of Radio Ga Ga. Only a hidden

⁴⁵ *The Lion King*, music: Elton John, lyrics: Tim Rice, book: Roger Allers, Irene Mecchi, additional music and lyrics: Lebo M, Mark Mancina, Jay Rifkin, Julie Taymor and Hans Zimmer. The musical is based on the 1994 Walt Disney Animation Studios' film *The Lion King*. World premiere: July 31, 1997, Orpheum Theater, Minneapolis.

⁴⁶ *Parade*, music, lyrics: Jason Robert Brown, book: Alfred Uhry based on the trial, imprisonment (1913) and lynching (1915) of a Jewish American in Atlanta, world premiere: December 17, 1998, Vivian Beaumont Theatre, New York.

⁴⁷ *Mamma mia!*, music: Benny Andersson, Björn Ulveaus, book: Catherine Johnson, world premiere: April 6, 1999, Prince Edward Theatre London.

⁴⁸ *We will rock you*, music, lyrics: Queen, book: Ben Elton, world premiere: May 14, 2002, Dominion Theatre, London.

group of Bohemians keeps up the memory of freedom of thought and the rock music of former times. The rebels Galileo and Scaramouche buck the system, are arrested but can escape, while the rest of the Bohemians are tortured. After all an electric guitar is found, and the rebels perform the song “We will rock you” what hackers of the transmitter succeed to broadcast. The rulers are defeated, and the people is liberated. Everybody joins in singing “We are the champions”. The musical’s dramaturgy enhances the message of the song to function as a hymn of resistance against manipulative absorption by merchandising strategies. In a time of expanding disruptive technologies, when many people strive against their experience to be helplessly outstripped, the song offers a psychological tool of training self empowerment.

An accusation of profiteers, who defraud trustful partners, who declare oblivious women insane in order to steel their property, who kill unwanted progeny and commit femicide, is the theme of Andrew Lloyd Webber’s *The Woman in White* (2003).⁴⁹ The musical displays the crimes described in Wilkie Collins’ basic mystery novel. Sir Perceval Glyde, a seemingly noble gentleman, is revealed as a bastard unworthy of the title of nobility, that he usurped. And he still hides another secret: He raped Anne Catherick, drowned their child, and let her declare insane to lock her up in a lunatic asylum. Greedy for money to pay off his debts, he, as a marriage impostor, craves for the rich property of Anne’s half-sister Laura. But he turns out to be a physically abusive husband, puts his new wife Laura in Anne’s place at the asylum, kills Anne and buries her in the grave prepared for Laura. Trying to kill Laura, he is run over by a train.

Stories about social outsiders provide a musical with extreme dramatic situations, exceptional tension and excitement. Stephen Schwartz’ *Wicked* (2003)⁵⁰ resumes stories of the witches of Oz in a compilation of fantasy novels and motives. The lead character is Elphaba, who has green skin like Osiris in ancient Egypt. As a student at the Shiz University she meets the beautiful, admired Galinda, the later Glinda the Good Witch. Dire conditions at school and the competition among the teachers and students, who pretend to be magicians, expose Elphaba because of her real witchcraft. After discovering the Wizard’s fraud, trickery and power-hungry suppression, Elphaba is slandered as the “Wicked Witch of the West” and persecuted by the wizard’s followers. They tried to kill her, but she could fake her death. In the turmoil she found the love of Fieryo, who shared her fate as a social outcast. Elphaba’s green skin is revealed to result from a spell of her father, the wizard of Oz.

Aiming for a great number of young spectators, musicals count on coming-of-age stories. Disney even produced a series of *High School Musicals* which also enhanced the production of musicals at schools and high schools.

The subject of a boy in a coal miners family, who realized his potential as a dancer, matched the demands of a coming-of-age story and the gap of social class distinctions. After the great success of Stephen Daldry’s film *Billy Elliot* (2000) Elton John asked Lee Hall, the author of the screenplay, to adapt it for a libretto of the musical *Billy Elliot* (2005).⁵¹

⁴⁹ *The Woman in White*, music: Andrew Lloyd Webber, lyrics: David Zippel, book: Charlotte Jones, based on Wilkie Collins’ novel *The Woman in White* (1850) and on elements of Charles Dickens’ short story *The Signal Man* (1866), world premiere: September 15, 2004, Palace Theatre, London.

⁵⁰ *Wicked*, music, lyrics: Stephen Schwartz, book: Winnie Holzman, based on the novel *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West* by Gregory Maguire (1995) which is based on the novel *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* by L. Frank Baum (1900) and its film adaptation of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (1939). World premiere: May 28, 2003, Curran Theatre, San Francisco.

⁵¹ *Billy Elliot*, music: Elton John, book, lyrics: Lee Hall (author of the screenplay of Stephen Daldry’s film *Billy Elliot – I will dance* (2000), basis of the musical). *Billy Elliot – The Musical*, music: Elton John, book, text: Lee Hall, director: Stephen Daldry, choreographer: Peter Darling, world premiere: March 31, 2005, Victoria Palace Theatre, London, DVD Universal 2014.

The musical starts with a film of an assembly of the coal miners who in 1984/1985 struck for better working conditions and payment. In the coal mining village of Evrington, Durham County, Northeast England, Billy's father and brother work as miners, and he too was supposed to follow the family's tradition. But instead of boxing, Billy wants to dance and joins the girls in the ballet class. His passion for dancing and creative moves affect his environment and brings together people of different kind: coal miners, policemen, boxers appear among the villagers on stage, tell their stories and dance tapdance, hip-hop, breakdance even with their special acrobatics.

The musical *The Color Purple* (2005)⁵² depicts an extreme collection of brutality, child sexual abuse, incest, cruelty to women and children by taking the example of an African American family in the American South during the first half of the 20th century. Celie, a girl of 14, is again pregnant by her father, who wants to get rid of her second child like he did with the first one. At the age of 18 Celie is married to Mister, a brutal husband, who continues the exploitation of her working power. Her sister Nettie flees from her father's approaches to Celie's home, but Mister attacks Nettie and chucks her out. In contrast to Celie's sufferance, the wife of Mister's son Harpo fights back Harpo's offences. She and also the singer of Harpo's juke point encourage Celie to resist her husband's brutality. When Celie announced to leave him, and Mister tried to beat her, she put a hex on him. The effects of Celie's curse make him reflect his life after his own tough childhood. Celia inherits her childhood home and starts a business on plant breeding. Nettie returns home and brings along Celie's children, whom she had reared.

The life-threatening of a witness to a murder among gangsters brought out a plot of extremely contrasting social milieus in Alan Menken's musical *Sister Act* (2006).⁵³ The lounge singer Deloris Van Cartier happens to witness her gangster boyfriend Curtis Shank (in London; in New York: Curtis Jackson) and his thugs shoot a man for backstabbing them to the police. Deloris flees to the police, but Shank orders his goons to checkmate her. The police grants her, hidden in a nun's habit, a witness protection program in a convent. Counteracting this way of living, Deloris breaks out of the convent to a neighborhood bar. Pretending to save 'lost souls' she sings and dances with the customers who then join the church's services. Tasked with conducting the choir, Deloris teaches songs of the Harlem traditional Gospel, and the choir attracts a big audience. When the applicants who want to buy the church welcome the choir's new style, Mother Superior has to overcome her disgust for Deloris' breaches of the orders, The television reports about the soaring demand for the church services even reach the pope. In a newspaper Shank recognizes Deloris. Detecting her among the sisters, Shank pulls a gun at her – in New York: at a sister, for whom Deloris steps in – and the nuns protect her. Shank is taken prisoner. Deloris and the nun choir perform a concert for the pope.

With its combination of a crime story, show elements and popular spiritual music the musical affirms the social value of the church's welfare work at a time of a serious

⁵² *The Color Purple*, music: Brenda Russell, Allee Willis, Stephen Bray, book: Marsha Norman, based on Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple* and Steven Spielberg's same-titled film, lyrics: Brenda Russell, Allee Willis, Stephen Bray, world premiere: November 1, 2005, Broadway Theatre New York.

⁵³ *Sister Act*, music: Alan Menken, book: Bill and Cheri Steinkellner, lyrics: Glenn Slater, world premiere: October 24, 2006, Pasadena Playhouse, USA; performances in London 2009 and on Broadway 2011 with changes of the action. The subject is adapted from: *Sister Act*, film directed by Emile Ardolino, screenplay: Joseph Howard, music: Marc Shaiman, producer: Teri Schwartz, USA 1992. (Sequels: *Sister Act 2: Back in the Habit*, directed by Bill Duke, screenplay: James Orr, Jim Cruickshank, Judi Ann Masin, music: Miles Goodman, producers, Scott Rudin, Dawn Steel, USA 1993; *Sister Act 3*, directed by Til Federle, screenplay: Regina Y. Hicks, Karin Gist, Madhuri Shekar, producers: Typer Perry, Whoopi Goldberg, Tom Leonardis, Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, USA planned for August 2024, Disney USA).

discomfiture about its moral condition. In addition it espouses an adjustment of clerical orders to the needs of their actual human environment.

The zeitgeist of the 1960ies, the spirit of a youth revolting against authoritarian rules and conventions of living conditions, their experiences of an expanding consciousness through music and drugs was confronted with the inhuman destruction of the proxy wars of the time in Vietnam, Israel, Angola, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Syria and Yemen. The wish of the young people for freedom and enjoyment of life was opposed by the demands of the military services and the news of soldiers being killed far away from their peaceful homes.

Julie Taymor displayed the extreme living conditions of the time in her film *Across the Universe* (2007).⁵⁴ On the screenplay of Dick Clement and Ian La Frenais and a compilation of 30 Beatles songs embedded in the score of Elliot Goldenthal the plot confronted a group of young people in New York, who still could follow the ideas of a “new age”, with the reports from their buddies who fought and died in Vietnam.



Already the induction process daunted the young men with James Montgomery Flagg’s demanding poster “Uncle Sam”⁵⁵ (1917), who points his finger at the viewer in order to recruit soldiers for the American Army during World War I, and thus signaling inescapability.

Photo: Library of Congress prints and photographs: an illustrated guide / Library of Congress. Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1995.

Taymor implemented historic footage to represent true realism. The song *Strawberry fields* was introduced by contemporary radio news about hundreds of killed soldiers. In New York the afflicted young artist smashed strawberries on his canvas and saw their red juice paint meaningful traces, while film clips showed exploding Napalm bombs in Vietnam.

A sarcastic mockery about religious missions characterizes *The Book of Mormon* (2011)⁵⁶ by Robert Lopez, Trey Parker and Matt Stone. For a long time the authors searched for a religious group, who would allow a critical view on their mission activities. After all they found The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. The musical confronts a missionary zeal with social reality. The Mormon Missionary Training Center sent its graduates as missionaries to foreign countries. In Uganda the ambitious Elder Kevin Price and the pop-culture-obsessed Arnold Cunningham face the reality of the AIDS-struck villagers threatened by the gang of the local warlord. Price failed to proselytize the warlord, who mocked, tortured and disillusioned the missionary. Cunningham combined the Mormon teachings with fantasy and science fiction motives, till the villagers believe in liberation and an earthly paradise. The village headman’s daughter Nabulungi, sick with AIDS, hopelessly falls in love with Cunningham, but can only ask him: “Baptize me!” To celebrate the presumed success, the mission president arrives. In honor of him, the villagers perform a show about Joseph Smith as the “American Moses” that reveals Cunningham’s pop-cultural reframing. The mission president dismisses the Elders, but they and the villagers understand that giving hope and helping the people is more important than teaching doctrines.

⁵⁴ *Across the Universe*, complete cast: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0445922/> [last accessed on March 14, 2024].

⁵⁵ Library of Congress prints and photographs: an illustrated guide / Library of Congress. Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1995, p. 43.

⁵⁶ *The Book of Mormon*, music, book, lyrics: Trey Parker, Robert Lopez, Matt Stone, world premiere: March 24, 2011, Eugene O’Neill Theatre, New York.

Featuring the music of one of the greatest rock-stars of our days, the jukebox musical ***Tina: The Tina Turner Musical*** (2018)⁵⁷ portrays her amazing development, starting with little Anna Mae Bullock in the 1950s in Nutbush, Tennessee. She had to face traumatizing experiences: poverty, bad family conditions, a separation from mother, father and sister, and an upbringing by her grandmother. Surprising with her big voice in the church choir, Tina applied to a St. Louis nightclub, where she joined Ike Turner's band. The vicious tempered and possessive Ike, traumatized by his own family, violated Tina, exploited, betrayed and left her, but in spite of that she accepted his apologies and married him.

Drugged and adulterous Ike harmed Tina's health even in her pregnancy, what she bore because of her children. After 14 years of their marriage Tina left Ike Turner, who still attempted to inhibit Tina's solo career claiming copyright over all songs from the *Ike & Tina Revue*. On their concert tours they often faced racial discrimination, and the record labels' racial constraints refused to sign a contract with a black woman of Tina's age. She filed for divorce. Only rejecting his toxic male supremacy, Tina could accomplish the real potential of her musical and performative qualities as a superstar. After all, her second husband Erwin Bach bestowed appreciation and support on her for the next 40 years of her career.

A special device of intimidation, repression and violence against women is female genital mutilation (FGM). According to the UNICEF⁵⁸ reports of 2023 it is practiced in 31 countries of Africa, including Egypt, Asia, including Indonesia, Kurdistan, the Middle East with Iraq and Yemen: "At least 200 million girls and women alive today" have been subjected to one or more types of female genital mutilation.

The case report of Waris Dirie's personal experience became the basis of Sherry Hormann's movie *Desert Flower* (D, A, F 2009) and was adapted in the musical *Die Wüstenblume* (2020).⁵⁹

Many musicals present subjects of political and social inequality, injustice and reactions to repression. The following examples treat issues of:

- Racial discrimination in *Showboat*, *Ragtime*, *West Side Story*, *Parade*, *Cabaret*, *Imagine this*, *Miss Saigon*, *The Color Purple*, *Tina*.
- Sexual and gender issues such as bisexuality, homosexuality and abuse in *A Chorus Line*, *Falsettos*, *Tommy*, *La Cage aux Folles*, *The Full Monty*, *Lempicka*.
- Dysfunctional relationships in *Cinderella*, *Oliver!*, *Into the Woods*, *Les Misérables*, *Elisabeth*, *I Love You You're Perfect Now Change*, *Moulin Rouge*, *Blood Brothers*, *Tina*.
- Occult and spiritual subjects in *On a Clear Day you Can See Forever*, *Dracula*, *Dance of the Vampires*, *Ghost*, *Everyman*, *Hadestown*.
- Physical diseases and addiction in *Rent*, *The Book of Mormon*, *AIDS!*, *HIV: The Musical*, *Days of Wine and Roses*.
- Mental health in *Lady in the Dark*, *Next to Normal*, *The Woman in White*, *Freudiana*, *Jekyll & Hyde*, *The Notebook*.
- Problems with aging in *Follies*, *A Little Night Music*, *Gypsy*, *Sunset Boulevard*, *Der Besuch der alten Dame*.

⁵⁷ *Tina – The Tina Turner Musical*, music, lyrics: various authors, songs by Tina Turner, book: Katori Hall, Frank Ketelaar, Kees Prins. World premiere: April 17, 2018, Aldwych Theater, London.

⁵⁸ "At least 200 million girls and women alive today living in 31 countries have undergone FGM", <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/female-genital-mutilation/> [last accessed on March 14, 2024].

⁵⁹ *Die Wüstenblume*, music: Uwe Fahrenkrog-Peterson, book: Gil Mehmert, Frank Ramond, based on the biography of Waris Dirie, world premiere: February 22, 2020, Theater St. Gallen, Switzerland.

- Rebellion against the governing social system in *Hair*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Les Misérables*, *Across the Universe*, *We Will Rock You*, *The Outsiders*.
- Criminal revenge for disadvantage and discrimination in *Chicago*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Assassins*, *Blood Brothers*, *Bonnie and Clyde*.
- Reactions to social pressures and image dominance in *Grease*, *Hairspray*, *Carousel*, *A Chorus Line*, *Legally Blonde*, *Billy Elliot*.

Aiming for gender liberation musicals display various aspects of feminist issues in gender relationships. They deconstruct reported events, myths and plots of traditional literature and theatre. On the one hand they display passive forms such as deficient education, economic dependence, bondage of social roles, responsibility for children, family care, sufferance from discrimination, female submissiveness, victimhood of exploitation, abuse, rape and mutilation. On the other hand there are active forms such as claims for equality, self empowerment, providing evidence of superiority, revolt, withdrawal of love, abandonment, vilification, carping criticism, crime, torture, murder and abuse of political, social or psychic power.

- Many musicals show portrayals of realistic women in conflict with social rules and conventions, for example *Guys and Dolls*, *West Side story*, *Les Misérables*, *Miss Saigon*, *Irma la Douce*, *Dancer in the Dark*, *The Woman in White*, *Dirty Dancing*, *Lempicka*.
- Emancipation is a focus of *The King and I*, *Victor/Victoria*, *My Fair Lady*, *Annie get Your Gun*, *Legally Blonde*, *Yentl*, *The Book of Mormon*, *Die Pöpstin*, *Anna Karenina*, Webber's *Cinderella* (on Broadway: *Bad Cinderella*).
- Women in politics are subjects in *Silk Stockings*, *Evita*, *Elisabeth*, *Marie Antoinette*, *Cléopâtre*, *la dernière reine d'Égypte*, *Aida*, *We will rock you*, *Mata Hari*, *Six – Divorced*, *Beheaded* (the wives of King Henry VIII).
- Special social roles of artists are treated in *Kiss me Kate*, *The Sound of Music*, *Cabaret*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, *Funny Girl*, *Phantom of the Opera*, *Love Never Dies*, *Moulin Rouge*, *Nine*, *Dirty Dancing*, *Chicago*, *Mamma Mia!*, *Hairspray*, *Sister Act*, *Lulu*, *Once Upon a One More Time* (Britney Spears songs).
- Fantasy and fairytale figures come alive in musicals such as *Cinderella*, *SnowWhite*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Mary Poppins*, *Wicked*, *Wonderland*, *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*, etc.

Many genres of the performing arts present strong messages engaged in social justice and criticism to fight for equality and better living conditions for the disadvantaged. In those countries which provide government grants for theatrical performances of drama and opera, throwing light on social deficiencies belongs to the educational mandate of subsidized institutions. In non-subsidized theatres which earn their living by predominantly offering entertainment, arousing social matters like those mentioned above function for creating a conflictual dramaturgy. They may also take up issues of the social class targeted as the musicals' audience. Among a repertoire of several thousand primarily entertaining musicals it is surprising to see those with challenging subjects achieve outstanding success.