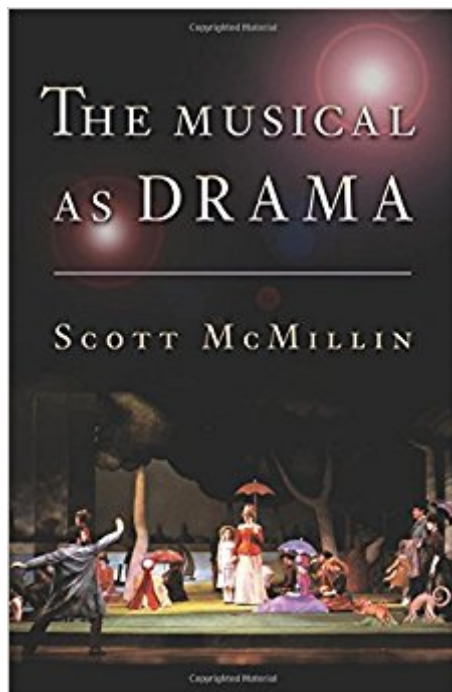


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# The Musical As Drama



## Synopsis

Derived from the colorful traditions of vaudeville, burlesque, revue, and operetta, the musical has blossomed into America's most popular form of theater. Scott McMillin has developed a fresh aesthetic theory of this underrated art form, exploring the musical as a type of drama deserving the kind of critical and theoretical regard given to Chekhov or opera. Until recently, the musical has been considered either an "integrated" form of theater or an inferior sibling of opera. McMillin demonstrates that neither of these views is accurate, and that the musical holds true to the disjunctive and irreverent forms of popular entertainment from which it arose a century ago. Critics and composers have long held the musical to the standards applied to opera, asserting that each piece should work together to create a seamless drama. But McMillin argues that the musical is a different form of theater, requiring the suspension of the plot for song. The musical's success lies not in the smoothness of unity, but in the crackle of difference. While disparate, the dancing, music, dialogue, and songs combine to explore different aspects of the action and the characters. Discussing composers and writers such as Rodgers and Hammerstein, Stephen Sondheim, Kander and Ebb, Leonard Bernstein, and Jerome Kern, *The Musical as Drama* describes the continuity of this distinctively American dramatic genre, from the shows of the 1920s and 1930s to the musicals of today.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Winner of the 2007 George Jean Nathan Award for Dramatic Criticism "A scholarly work, with good

supporting bibliographic footnotes, this book merits serious study. . . . Highly recommended."--Choice"Scott McMillin is giving musicals the respect they deserve. If you want to know how a car is constructed, you might consult a Chilton's vehicle manual. If you want to know how a pie is constructed, you might consult the Fanny Farmer Cookbook. If you want to know how a musical is constructed, you might consult *The Musical as Drama* by Scott McMillin. This adoring yet studious book dissects familiar musicals as if they were biology frogs and academically discusses their skeletal and muscular systems."--Eve Lichtgarn, *Westside Chronicle*"Rarely does a book come along that seems to elegantly summarize what has come before while taking its subject to the next level. *The Musical as Drama* is just such a book. ...This volume encapsulates an entire career's reflection on the nature and structure of musical theater....This well-written, lucid, and effective book should serve as a fine addition to the expanding scholarship on America's musical theater."--Elizabeth A. Wells, *Notes*"Staunchly defending a much-maligned genre, McMillin sets his sights high. . . . Even if one disagrees with some of his tastes and arguments, his defense of the musicals of the last half-century is convincing and, appropriately, an entertaining one."--Heather Heckman, *Screening the Past*"McMillin's specific examples are at once astute and persuasive and somehow obvious (and I mean this as the highest compliment). Anyone who reads this book (and all with even a passing interest in musical theatre should) will constantly be struck with a 'Why didn't I think of that?' feeling."--Stacy Wolf, *Text & Presentation*

"This is a lovely book, and it blows in like a breath of fresh air. After the theory, the apologetics, the cultural guilt, the special interests--here comes a book that tells you it's OK to like musicals, whoever you are."--Stephen Banfield, University of Bristol, author of *Jerome Kern and Sondheim's Broadway Musicals*"McMillin offers a thoughtful philosophical approach to the aesthetics of a distinctive and important American genre, providing insightful commentary on how several significant musicals adapt and transform the conventions of the genre to powerful dramatic ends."--Geoffrey Block, University of Puget Sound, General Editor, *Yale Broadway Masters Series*

This small but very rangy book will give the aficionado and newcomer alike a lot to think about. It's no rehash, as so many books on the musical are, but a fresh look at many aspects of writing and production, always discussed in terms of live performance. I never noticed before, but, as McMillin points out, an important phrase of "I Could Have Danced All Night" in *My Fair Lady* turns up at the start of "I've Grown Accustomed To Her Face," as if Eliza is now more or less inhabiting Henry Higgins' mind. McMillin is also very interesting when he describes the first five minutes of *West*

SideStory and how dance seems more eloquent than any dialogue or lyrics might be. The book is beautifully produced, too, though the stage stills could have been a little sharper.

the way it is presented is enjoyable, fun and catching. It explores an ancient topic that is drama with a modern approach. Plays are turned to musicals to cope with 3 D and 4 D screens including all the dazzling elements to catch the 21st century audience. Who said that drama is out of fashion??!!

Very good book

McMillin may have been a fine English professor, but that doesn't mean he's adequately equipped to talk about live theatre intelligently. Theatre is not literature. A script and score are not a show; they are merely blueprints. The show only exists live in performance, with the collaboration of a director, actors, designers, musicians, and an audience. McMillin (like too many others) doesn't get that. Too much of this book is spent on interesting theories that don't really make sense when applied to actual musical theatre pieces. And though the book is new, it assumes musicals are pretty much the same as they were mid-century, apparently unaware of the profound evolution the art form has been going through since the mid-1990s. So, sadly, many of his conclusions have no relevance whatsoever to musical theatre today. And, as often happens when people who don't work in the theatre try to write about it, there are just too many factual errors and misunderstandings of the art form throughout the book.

I am post-Grad theater student with a focus on musical theater. This book has been so helpful in writing my thesis and other papers. The theory discussed in this book distinguishes musical theater as a relevant art. Despite MacMillan's profession as an English professor, he is well versed in the art of performance studies. Just because he has a degree in one thing does not mean he is unqualified or uneducated in others. He discusses the book and score in sections of this book, but also pays close attention to audience experience and perception. He discusses certain staples of the American musical catalog as examples of the theory he is proposing, but discusses a wide array of past and present work from Lady in the Dark to Hedwig and the Angry Itch. I recommend this book to anyone interested in theater theory.

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