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Strike Up The Band: A New History Of Musical Theatre



Synopsis

The way some histories portray the advent of musicals, you'd think the genre emerged fully formed with *Show Boat*. Yet in truth, it took root decades earlier. In *Strike Up the Band* Scott Miller tells the whole story of musicals, pulling back the curtain on the amazing innovation and adventurousness of the art form, revealing its political and social conscience, and chronicling its incredibly rapid evolution over the last century. *Strike Up the Band* focuses not only on what happened on stage but also on how it happened and why it matters to us today. It's a different kind of history that explores the famous and, especially, the not-so famous productions to discover the lineage that paved the way to contemporary musicals. Digging into 150 shows, Miller offers a forward-looking perspective on treasures from each era - such as *Anything Goes*, *West Side Story*, *Hair*, and *Rent* - while also looking at fascinating, genre-busting, and often short-lived productions, including *Bat Boy*, *Rocky Horror Show*, *Promenade*, and *The Capeman*, to see how even obscure or commercially unsuccessful musicals defined and advanced the form. Moving decade by decade, Miller offers insight and inside information about the artistic approaches various composers, lyricists, bookwriters, and directors have taken, how those approaches have changed over time, and what social and historical forces continue to shape musical theatre today. He provides a strong sense of what groups have historically controlled the industry and how other groups' hard work and vision continue to change the musical theatre landscape for the better. In fact, *Strike Up the Band* opens a new and vitally important discussion of the roles played in the musical's history by people of color, by gays and lesbians, by people with disabilities, and by women. It frames musical theatre as an important, irreplaceable piece of American history and demonstrates how it reflects the social and political conditions of its time - and how it changes them. On Broadway or off, *Strike Up the Band* is as adventuresome, detailed, and thoughtful in tracing the story behind the musical as it is in celebrating the form's diversity, vigor, innovation, and promise. Join Scott Miller not only in commemorating great moments on stage, but in gaining a powerful understanding of what the musical was, what it is today, and what it is becoming.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Who'd have think that American musical theatre was so deliciously progressive and subversive. Scott Miller provides an effusively intimate set of grace notes covering the evolution of the form. The book is filled with such intriguing hooks such Neil Simon being called in to punch up the dialog of A Chorus Line, Les Mis cost \$16m in overtime (it ran just over 3 hours) so in early 2001 14 minutes were cut in the Broadway version (but not the touring companies) in order to keep the show solvent and that the wording in Phantom suffered because Andrew Lloyd Webber did not collaborate with his lyricists, rather he handed down the score from above which made for an awkward fit. Most of the book is about how the medium was used to push the boundaries of what could be said about violence, sexuality, racism and social inequity. Intriguingly he brings out the social intensity of "The Cradle with Rock" and manages to link "Oklahoma!" and Rent - the 1943 wholesome musical farm musical, which set a musical dance style for a generation, so much so that dream ballets were required (ie: Anita and Tony's ballet dance in Act II of "West Side Story"), is much darker than one initially thinks - Judd is a pornographer a murderer and possibly a rapist (pp49). One main character in 1945's Carousel commits suicide and the other, Julie, has to deal with ostracism from her community plus the conflict of being in love with the man who beat her. Sarafina! is about hope, made even more poignant once you understand that an integral part of black resistance to the Afrikaaner regime was to perform it in English. Both Ragtime and Show confront anti-black racism, but so did Shuffle Along, Cabin in the Sky, Carmen Jones and Jelly's Last Jam, all on much smaller budgets.

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