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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.

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Customer Reviews

"Obviously well-versed on his subject (he's written about musical theatre before). . . Miller does look decade by decade at the musical with insight and frequently with broad knowledge of the story behind a particular show." --Backstage"Miller has been writing, performing in, and directing musicals since 1981 - clearly, this is a man who lives, eats and breathes musicals. You can feel his excitement from the first page of the introductory chapter." --TalkinBroadway.com"Densely packed and immensely well-informed . . . Miller's tone is collegial, his analysis at times deceptively acute, and his material obviously well informed by research and experience. The enthusiasm with which Miller expresses his own love for musical theatre is infectious." --Ben Macpherson, Studies in Musical Theatre

Scott Miller is the founder and artistic director of New Line Theatre, an alternative musical theatre company in St. Louis. He holds a degree in music and musical theatre from Harvard University, and he has been writing, performing in, and directing musicals since 1981. He has written six books on musical theatre, including *Sex, Drugs, Rock & Roll, and Musicals* (2011), *Strike Up the Band* (2007), *Let the Sun Shine In* (2003), *Rebels with Applause* (2001), *Deconstructing Harold Hill* (2000), and *From Assassins to West Side Story* (1996).

I'm not going to wax poetic but this is the PERFECT textbook for my high school musical theatre class. It is written at a level that is accessible to students but doesn't pander. It is well researched and informative but still includes occasional editorial comments that remind us that the author is human and really does have a personality. I appreciate the fact that the book is relatively short and will not overwhelm someone who just picks it up and wants to travel chronologically through the history of the American musical. Obviously, Miller's book is not exhaustive and he admits this up front. He doesn't waste time talking about musicals that weren't socially or theatrically important or influential (*The Sound of Music*) but also touches on a few groundbreaking but relatively underrated

shows like Little Johnny Jones. The best thing about this book is that Miller takes a decade like the 1940s (arguably one of the most rich and influential periods in musical theatre) and gives us the basics in fifteen pages. But he hits ALL the high points. That book is such a great jumping off point for so many great discussions because Miller really does a good job showing the *development* of musical theatre and its connectivity to their contemporaneous social and political conditions. Overall, this is just a refreshing and sophisticated rendering of musical theatre that doesn't get bogged down in trivialities or tangents. Miller keeps moving and consequently, keeps us looking forward. THANK YOU! My ONLY two complaints... Miller considers Porgy and Bess an opera and therefore omits it entirely. Also, I wish there was a hardcover edition.... as a textbook, the paperbacks will not stand up well to the abuse of high school students :)

Bought this used and it was in really great condition.

Reading this book has pointed me to multiple excellent shows I wouldn't have been aware of otherwise. It is an information-packed read and yet a light and entertaining one. I especially admire the commitment to presenting shows that were important shows even if they didn't do well on Broadway or even play on Broadway. For even the most seasoned theater folks, some chapter in this book (nicely organized by decade, by the way) will open up your world and show you something you didn't know.

Love this book! I've been using it for my history of Broadway class and I love it

Starting with the first page entitled, "The Overture", this book instantly captures your interest and compels you to read on to find out what each consecutive chapter contains. Scott Miller's words make every era, from the early 1900's up to the present time, an exciting journey through the history of musical theatre. I liked the fact that he integrated into his book what was going on in the world at the time the musicals were produced. Reading about my old favorites, "Oklahoma", "The King and I" and "South Pacific" was pure fun, but learning about one of the newer musicals, "Urinetown", was not only fun, but enlightening. I've read all his previous books, but this one tops them all!

Miller provides a straight forward overview of musical theatre history- condensing information into about 10-20 pages per decade. There are more in-depth books out there, but this is a solid go-to resource. My major complaint is that he sometimes meanders too far into the social commentary

side of things, and his opinions may end up being a distraction to those seeking a relatively unbiased take on musical theatre history.

A fascinating look at the history of musical theater, written in easy prose, and full of insight. I read it cover to cover.

If you are looking for an objective history of American musical theater this is not the book for you in my humble opinion. The author averages about 10 pages per decade for the period from 1900 through 1960 & 20+ pages per decade thereafter. Further, the author displays a clear Liberal bias which has become all too common among Harvard faculty & graduates since the end of WWII. As a result of that bias he devotes far greater attention to works he considers to be politically correct than he does to most other shows. All in all, I believe this book will & probably does have very limited appeal.

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