



A Time for Something Smaller

by Michael E. McKelvey

On March 11, 2020, Tulane University issued a statement informing the campus community that all classes would move online and all University activities would be cancelled due to an outbreak of COVID-19 in New Orleans. With less than 24-hours' notice, our production of *Urinetown*, which we had rehearsed for the past five weeks, was cancelled. We subsequently refocused our efforts and created a virtual event in honor of Stephen Sondheim's 90th birthday; however, for the following semester, I wanted to give my students an opportunity to perform in person if at all possible.

New institutional guidelines for the Fall 2020 semester stated that singing and the playing of wind and brass instruments would only be permissible online or outdoors (J.S. Held 9), which would make producing a musical in person a challenge. While several schools were successfully producing large-cast musicals, albeit mostly virtually, the idea of rehearsing and performing a medium- or large-scale show in person seemed daunting given these new guidelines and the size and resources of our program at Tulane. As an alternative, I began to investigate smaller musicals that would provide a valuable educational experience and also allow us to follow the University health and safety guidelines in rehearsals and performances. In this article, I will examine the small musical repertoire and demonstrate how these shows may be advantageous and valuable options within the paradigm of a musical theatre curriculum, particularly for programs with limited resources during the COVID-19 pandemic.

PRODUCING MUSICAL THEATRE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Singing came under tremendous scrutiny after the March 10, 2020 incident in Skagit County, WA, where 53 of the 61 choir members attending a 2.5-hour rehearsal became ill and two choir members eventually died (Hamner et al. 606). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) first believed that SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, was spread primarily through droplet transmission; however, the CDC updated the report in October 2020 to include contact and airborne transmission ("Scientific Brief"). Findings from a study in *Aerosol Science and Technology*, which included seven professional opera singers and five amateur singers, indicated that increased volume levels,

singing higher pitches, and exaggerated articulation during singing and speaking significantly generated more aerosol particles than normal breathing and speaking. The findings also showed that wearing a mask during loud singing reduced the amount of generated aerosol particles to a range similar to that of normal talking (Alsved et al. 1248). With so much of musical theatre involving speaking and singing, these findings raised considerable concerns as to how rehearsals and performances should proceed.

Many professional organizations subsequently released guidelines on how to lower the risk of exposure during instruction. The Voice and Speech Trainers Association (VASTA) released *COVID-19 Scenario Planning Guidelines* that recommended “Voice, Speech, Dialect and Text classes be taught online until such time as a vaccine or cure for COVID-19 is developed that refutes the known dangers outlined in current scientific literature” (2). The document stated that the following factors might increase the risk of infection: poor building ventilation, close proximity of students between classes and social gatherings, narrow hallways and stairwells, the number of students in teaching spaces, recycled air through HVAC systems, and shared instructional materials (4). A July 2020 study in the *Journal of Voice* recommended that the safest option for singing would be online or outdoors (Naunheim et al. 5). The American Choral Directors Association (ACDA) provided guidelines that encouraged choirs to rehearse in small groups (e.g., sectionals); use larger indoor venues (e.g., auditoriums, auditorium lobbies with exit doors for ventilation, gymnasiums) or outdoor areas (e.g., covered parking garages); wear masks; and use virtual programs and other technological tools for instruction when possible (Nápoles 39-40).

In order to comply with these new health and safety guidelines, musical theatre programs were forced to reassess and consider the unique advantages and disadvantages of various instructional models and delivery systems for classes, rehearsals, and musical theatre performances. For a completely remote learning model (i.e., where all rehearsals and performances would be conducted online), actors would

need to self-record (from their distant locations) content that would be edited together later. While arguably the safest option, completely remote instruction could also create a unique set of challenges, including an increased sense of isolation; a decreased sense of ensemble; difficulty in scheduling; interruptions and distractions due to technical issues; increased workload for all involved due to the learning curve with technology; and gaps in equity and access among instructors, directors, students, and actors (*COVID-19 Scenario 8*).

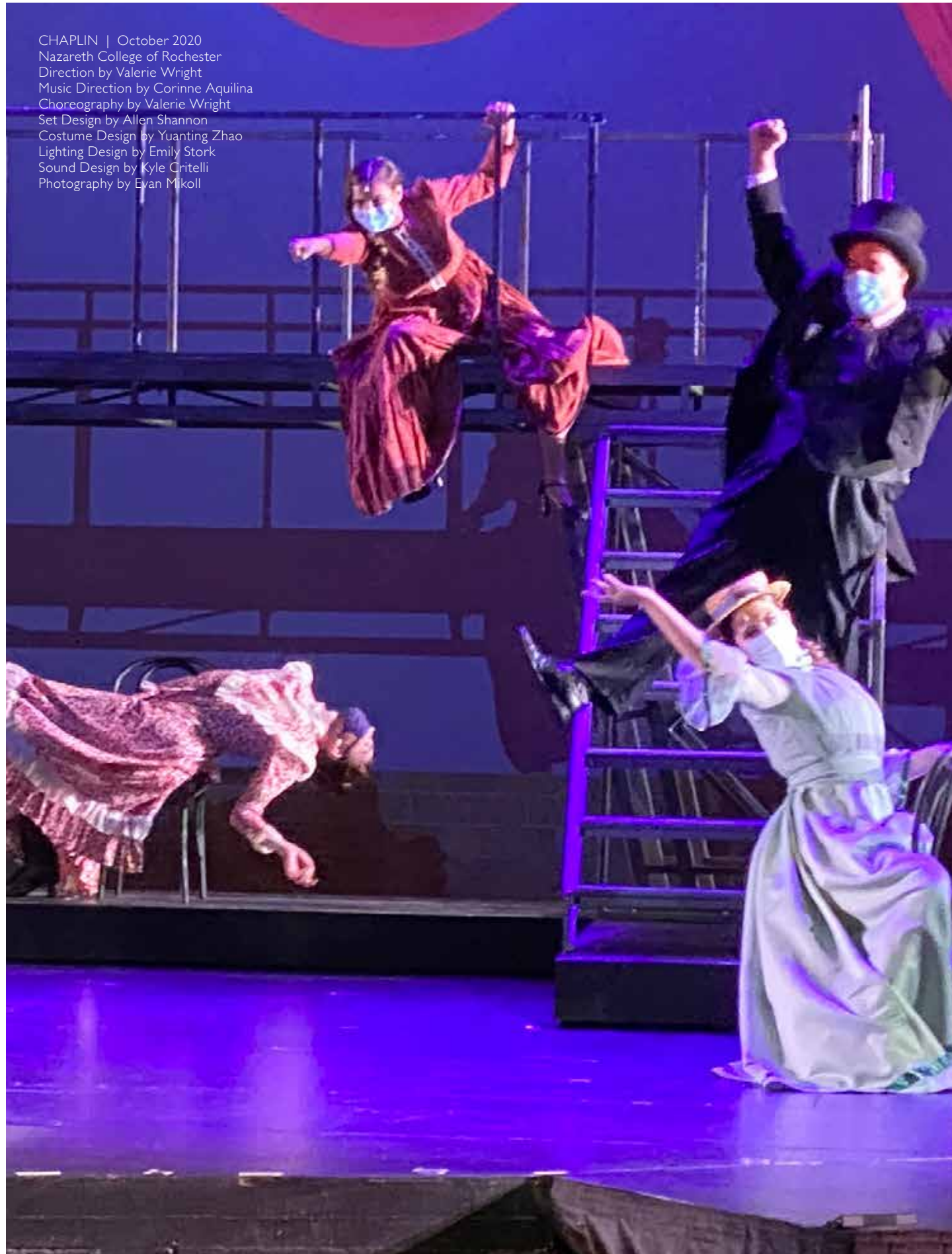
A hybrid model, which utilizes a combination of online and in-person instruction, offers more flexible options for musical theatre rehearsals and performances. Programs could use an online platform to more easily facilitate initial preparatory rehearsals and limit the amount of contact time with the cast followed by limited in-person rehearsals and performances. However, these rehearsals and performances would need to follow numerous guidelines, including social distancing, wearing masks, handwashing, limiting the number of participants and the duration of each work session, sanitizing and storing props and costumes, training actors to be more self-reliant with costumes and body mics, conducting temperature checks, and following any COVID-19 testing procedures.

As I began to research musical theatre production options during the pandemic, I conducted a survey of forty university and college musical theatre programs throughout the United States to ascertain rehearsal and performance procedures, health and safety protocols, delivery of performances (e.g., in person, live stream, scheduled stream), and title selection for the Fall 2020 semester. Twenty-six of the forty schools produced a musical, revue, song cycle, or other show that included music. All productions streamed the performances online; however, two of the shows also performed in front of a live, socially-distanced audience. Nine programs produced a medium- or large-cast musical or operetta, such as *Spring Awakening*, *Spamalot*, *Chess*, and *Pirates of Penzance*. Nine programs produced an original work that included program- and student-created cabarets, revues, devised work, original

SONGS FOR A NEW WORLD | September/October 2020
University of Oklahoma
Photography by Wendy Mutz



CHAPLIN | October 2020
Nazareth College of Rochester
Direction by Valerie Wright
Music Direction by Corinne Aquilina
Choreography by Valerie Wright
Set Design by Allen Shannon
Costume Design by Yuanting Zhao
Lighting Design by Emily Stork
Sound Design by Kyle Critelli
Photography by Evan Mikoll



plays with music, etc. Eight programs produced small musicals, such as *Songs for a New World*, *Ordinary Days*, [title of show], *Myths & Hymns*, *Ride the Cyclone*, and *POPI!*. Fourteen of the programs deferred producing a musical until the Spring 2021 semester in order to figure out technological logistics or in hopes that restrictions might become more accommodating.

Most productions rehearsed online for a portion of the process to limit the number of in-person rehearsals. In several cases, recordings of vocal parts and choreography were given to the students in advance for self-preparation. In some cases, in-person rehearsals were conducted in small groups of four to five cast members for short intervals of time (usually thirty minutes). Some productions held rehearsals outdoors. For in-person rehearsals, most productions followed guidelines and recommendations issued by the professional entertainment unions and associations, such as the joint report from the American Guild of Musical Artists (AGMA) and the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society (SDC), which recommended ventilation of the rehearsal room, identifying pods and creating bubbles of performers and production staff, spacing considerations for singers and dancers, and safety protocols for wig, make up, and costume personnel (*Return to Stage* 11-12, 20, 22, 24-26, 28-29).

Considering that wind and brass instruments could emit varying levels of aerosol particles and droplets (He 5-6), compounded with the spacing demands of an orchestra, several productions opted to use pre-recorded backing tracks. However, a few programs were able to find ways to include instrumentalists in their productions. For example, a production of *Chess* at San Diego State utilized the talents of their symphony orchestra and chamber choir by recording them in a university parking garage while socially spaced (Brotebeck).

Through these interviews, I was inspired by the programs that were able to successfully produce a larger-scale work in person or virtually. However, with the limited resources and stringent COVID-19 protocols within the City of New Orleans and at Tulane University, selecting several small musicals appeared to be the best option for our situation.

DEFINING A SMALL MUSICAL

For the purpose of this article, I will define a small musical as one that calls for a cast of two to fifteen actors (based on the original production), has minimal set and costume requirements, and is geared toward a more intimate setting. These shows may be categorized as chamber musicals (e.g., *The Last Five Years*); small-cast musicals, which also may employ a small auxiliary chorus (e.g., *Little Shop of Horrors*, *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder*); ensemble musicals (e.g., *Godspell* and *Honk*); revues or themed cabarets (e.g., *Starting Here*, *Starting Now*); jukebox shows (e.g., *Five Guys Named Moe*); and song cycles (e.g., *Fugitive Songs*).

In researching the origins of small musicals, one might be led to the beginnings of the integrated musical itself—the seven “Princess” musicals of Jerome Kern, Guy Bolton, and P. G. Wodehouse. Constructed in 1912, The Princess Theatre had a seating capacity of 299. After diminishing box office returns due to the programming of Grand Guignol-style, one-act plays, F. Ray Comstock, owner of the “little jewel of a theatre,” transitioned to producing small musicals (Flinn 140).

The limited seating of The Princess Theatre restricted potential revenue, which meant producing shows with smaller budgets, fewer cast members and instrumentalists, and simplified production elements compared to other musicals and operettas during that time. For example, *Nobody Home*, the first of the Princess shows, only used two sets and employed young, inexpensive performers, a chorus of eight to twelve singers, and an orchestra of eleven instrumentalists. In contrast, the costume musicals and operettas of the time often featured the prominent stars of the day and used around a dozen sets, 90 singers in the chorus, and 45 instrumentalists in the pit (Flinn 142).

“In the best of the Princess musicals,” according to John Kenrick, “every element was organic, developing naturally from story and character. This type of development allowed these shows to dispose of star turns, interpolated songs, and forced comic characters found in most previous American musicals” (Kenrick 141-42). Denny Martin Flinn states, “With less distraction from production elements, their songs and comedy, in addition to standing on their own, had to carry the action forward consistently, and thus had to be an integral part of the plot in order to keep the audience interest . . . but as the musical numbers became more integrated within the show, they depended increasingly on the quality of the book for ultimate effect” (142). What Kern, Bolton, and Wodehouse created was the model for the integrated book musicals that would follow with attention to story, songs that integrated with the plot, and fast-paced delivery of dialogue. Many of the qualities that made the Princess musicals unique and successful are the very attributes that make small musicals advantageous to musical theatre programs, especially during the time of COVID-19.

NOT ONLY CAN SMALLER WORKS OFFER A MORE FEASIBLE OPTION FOR MUSICAL THEATRE PROGRAMS DURING THE PANDEMIC, THEY CAN ALSO OFFER SEVERAL UNIQUE ADVANTAGES IN THE PERFORMANCE, DESIGN, AND PRODUCTION EXPERIENCE.

THE ADVANTAGES AND CHALLENGES OF A SMALL MUSICAL

Theatre departments are often drawn to large-scale shows in order to offer a greater number of production and performance opportunities to students. Also, those not cast in primary roles would have the chance to hone their dance and vocal skills in the ensemble. Furthermore, medium- and large-scale musicals oftentimes have the advantage of greater title recognition by both students and audiences. However, not only can smaller works offer a more feasible option for musical theatre programs during the pandemic, they can also offer several unique advantages in the performance, design, and production experience.

When asked about creating a smaller work, *Ordinary Days* creator, Adam Gwon, said, “I like being able to dive deep into characters on a ‘chamber’ show. You’ve got to make a compelling story with fewer characters, and I find it’s an opportunity to really delve into the hearts and minds of the people you’re writing.” *Dani Girl* lyricist, Chris Dimond, added, “Chamber musicals allow for a much more intimate storytelling experience. They often allow for the writer, and the audience, to focus on character and story, rather than production value.”

Selecting a show with fewer characters who have more scene and song work throughout may provide beneficial contextual opportunities for students to apply the technical concepts covered in their acting, scene study, and song analysis courses. This can be as true for an integrated book show (e.g., *A Minister’s Wife*, an adaptation of George Bernard Shaw’s, *Candida*) as it can for a themed cabaret or song cycle. In the case of the latter, the songs can serve as stand-alone monologues where the performer has the opportunity to develop a character’s background and intent (e.g., “If I Sing” from *Closer Than Ever* and “Stars and the Moon” from *Songs for a New World*).

Furthermore, double casting a small musical with six sizable roles may actually provide a better educational experience for those twelve performers than the four or five featured roles in most medium- or large-cast shows. During the time of COVID-19, adding a shadow cast would also be a prudent option in case actors test positive or need to quarantine due to contact tracing. Double casting may increase the workload of the director, choreographer, and music director; however, this effort can be offset as small musicals will not require teaching, staging, and choreographing large production numbers.

In Oklahoma University’s recent production of *Songs for a New World*, director Ashton Byrum expanded the four-person cast to six and double cast the show. The performers were masked for the performances, which fit well into Byrum’s concept. He said, “Setting the show on Election Day in NYC and framing it with the concept of protest—especially around the movement for Black Lives—and the pandemic, added a sense of urgency and updated the context for the piece—which was very meaningful for all of us” (Byrum).

While small musicals are often created with intimate theatrical settings in mind, they can nevertheless present unique challenges and creative opportunities for designers as well, especially during the time of COVID-19. For example, no matter the size of the venue, the sound designer is tasked with the challenge of creating a balance between the actors and the band (or backing track). In a small theatre, floor or choir mics are often sufficient to amplify the voices on stage. However, if performers have to sing while wearing masks due to COVID-19 safety guidelines, the sound designer may have to use body or wig mics to contend with the dampening and muffling created by the masks. Furthermore, the designer will have to create protocols to safely mic the actors and sanitize the equipment.

Several small musicals can also be problematic for reasons not related to their small size. Some titles are dated and may not resonate with today’s students and audiences (e.g., *I Do! I Do!* and *Nonsense*). The world’s longest running musical, *The Fantasticks*, written by Tom Jones and Harvey Schmidt in 1960, has been criticized for its negative stereotyping of Native Americans and Latinos; for portraying sexism; and the rape scene, which has been changed to the “abduction,” yet still presents an issue in the wake of the #MeToo movement (Bauer-Wolfe). More recent shows such as *Bloody, Bloody Andrew Jackson* and *The Adding Machine* have also come under scrutiny due to their potential reinforcement of negative ethnic stereotypes and racist content. Although some might argue the intent behind the material may be actually a condemnation of White supremacy and systemic racism, adequate facilitation must be provided for our students when tackling material which could be incendiary (Norman; Combs).

LICENSING AND STREAMING A SMALL MUSICAL

Prior to COVID-19, streaming licenses were not an option for universities or theatre companies and video recording required special permission and additional licensing fees. In less than a year, educators have been forced to learn about streaming licenses in addition to digital recording, editing, and ticketing. Concurrently, licensing companies have been forced to negotiate streaming arrangements and licensing agreements with show creators, stakeholders, and producers.

The rights for a majority of these more diminutive shows can be obtained through licensing houses such as Music Theatre International (MTI), which also handles the Disney musicals, and Concord Theatricals, which includes the catalogues of Tams-Witmark, Rodgers and Hammerstein, Samuel French, and Andrew Lloyd Webber. These two licensors represent over 1,200 titles ranging from large, commercial shows to Theatre for Youth Audiences (TYA) musicals. Omitting school editions and TYA shows, small musicals constitute about 25% of the musicals that MTI and Concord represent.



Although MTI and Concord are the largest licensors in the business, there are popular small musicals handled by companies such as Dramatists Play Service (DPS), Theatrical Rights Worldwide, and Broadway Licensing. DPS represents titles such as *Bat Boy: The Musical*, *Crowns*, *Grey Gardens*, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, and *Passing Strange*. DPS also licenses the smaller musicals of Michael John LaChiusa, one of the most prolific writers in this category, including *Hello Again* and *Little Fish*, and his collections of short musicals, *First Lady Suite*, *Lucky Nurse* and *Other Short Musical Plays*, and *See What I Wanna See*.

Theatrical Rights Worldwide (TRW) and Broadway Licensing are newer companies, but they have acquired significant titles. TRW first carved out its place in the market with off-Broadway shows like *I Love You Because*, *Bare*, *Illyria*, *Beehive*, *Zanna Don't*, and *Captains Courageous*. Broadway Licensing has built its catalogue on smaller Broadway, off-Broadway, and regional shows like *BKLYN the Musical*, *Disenchanted!*, *The Old Man and the Old Moon*, and *Ride the Cyclone*.

Unfortunately, only a limited number of titles from the aforementioned licensors are available for streaming, and the manner in which a show can be streamed is often restricted as well. Most licensors offer three types of streaming licenses: live-streaming (transmitting the performance in real time as it is happening onstage); scheduled content (streaming of pre-recorded content at scheduled times); and video on demand (uploading content that can be viewed by patrons on demand). For example, some titles, such as MTI's *Songs for a New World*, *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder*, and *John & Jen*, permit all types of streaming, whereas *Once on This Island* and *Lucky Stiff* can only be live-streamed or viewed through scheduled content ("Available for Streaming").

To make a streaming license possible, all creators and contractual stakeholders must give permission. Coordinating these agreements can be a painstaking and time-consuming task for the licensor and becomes even more complicated for shows that contain material from multiple writers (e.g., a jukebox show) or where a stakeholder is deceased. In many cases, the creators simply have an objection to their creative material being accessible on a platform where there may be a greater potential for pirating (Prignano).

By December 2020, MTI had announced approximately 70 titles (excluding TYA and school editions) would be available for streaming by universities and theatres ("Available for Streaming"). Of those, over 40% are small musicals. However, MTI announced that popular titles like *Ain't Misbehavin'*, *The All Night Strut*, *Forever Plaid*, *Plaid Tidings*, *tick, tick...BOOM!*, *Baby*, and *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* would not be available for streaming ("Titles Not Available to Stream"). Similarly, Concord Theatricals would not offer a streaming license for *Be More Chill*, *Death Takes a Holiday*, *The Rocky Horror Show*, *Ruthless!*, and *Charlie Brown Christmas* ("Are Virtual Performances"). It should be noted that if you are interested in a title that does not appear on a "not available for streaming" list, you should ask the licensor because some right holders approve streaming licenses on a case-by-case basis (Culwell-Block).

WITH SO MANY VARIABLES AND CONCERNS TO CONSIDER, THIS PANDEMIC DEMANDS THAT WE—AS DIRECTORS, CHOREOGRAPHERS, MUSIC DIRECTORS, PRODUCERS, AND MOST IMPORTANTLY, EDUCATORS—REEVALUATE THE EDUCATIONAL BENEFIT WE ARE TRYING TO ACHIEVE THROUGH MUSICAL THEATRE PRODUCTION.

INDEPENDENT LICENSING AND NEW, SMALL MUSICALS

Because a considerable number of titles from these licensors were not available for streaming, I decided to reach out to creators directly to see if they would be more amenable to digital options for their unrepresented works. Since licensors ultimately decide what shows they want to represent, I discovered a considerable number of heralded, award-winning, small musicals that were not licensed by one of the aforementioned companies. For example, Adam Gwon's, *Ordinary Days*, licensed by Concord, is by far his most popular and most often produced title; however, *Scotland PA*, *String*, *Cake Off*, and *Bernice Bobs Her Hair* are licensed by Gwon's representatives and have had considerable success off-Broadway and regionally.

One can explore a number of different avenues to discover more small musical titles that might be available for licensing and streaming. If you know the show, you can try going directly to the website of the show or the writer. You can also take a more investigative approach and research new, smaller shows on platforms dedicated to contemporary writers. For example, NewMusicalTheatre.com, co-founded by Kait Kerrigan and Brian Lowdermilk, is an open platform where visitors can see the works of over 70 songwriters and composition teams. Some of the shows listed are represented by a licensor but many are not. Lowdermilk shared, "We founded NewMusicalTheatre.com in order to provide the highest royalty rate in the industry for writers and to give writers direct control over the publication of their work . . . I'm proud of how we've been able to create new revenue streams for independent writers."

In my efforts to further investigate working with a writer or composition team to produce a newer show or one in development, I also contacted the BMI Lehman Engel Musical Theatre Workshop, which for fifty years has been the foremost training ground for new musical theatre writers, including the creators of *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Nine, Avenue Q*, and *Next To Normal* ("ASCAP, BMI"). In addition to coordinating with BMI, I researched titles recently produced or developed by workshops, festivals, and theatres known for championing new, small musicals, including: The ASCAP Foundation Musical Theatre Workshop; National Alliance for Musical Theatre, Festival of New Musicals; Williamstown Theatre Festival; Eugene O'Neil Theater Center; National Music Theatre Conference; Barrington Stage Company, Musical Theatre Lab; Pittsburgh Civic Light Opera, SPARK program for small musicals; Theatre Now; The Public Theatre; and Playwrights Horizons.

As I researched these festivals, conferences, and development programs, I encouragingly noticed a number of works by BIPOC and LGBTQ+ creators—demographics woefully underrepresented in the catalogues of commercial licensors. As theatre companies and institutions of higher learning place more importance on inclusion, equity, and diversity, the need to tell the stories of BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and other marginalized groups has become even more important. The previously mentioned musical theatre development programs, workshops, festivals, and theatres are important resources for becoming acquainted with these artists and their new works.

In the process of connecting with writers, I also learned of some new projects featuring smaller musicals that centered on life in the time of COVID and the surge in digital theatre creation. Tim McDonald and iTheatrics, the creators of *Zoomsical*, developed a new collection of small musicals chronicling COVID-19 experiences—*Breathe: A Musical Theatre Quintet*. McDonald and writing partner Jodi Picoult came up with the premise



when McDonald contracted the virus at a wedding. They crafted five stories based on his experience, the accounts of others afflicted by the virus, the media coverage of the pandemic, and the heightened racial tensions surrounding the killing of George Floyd. In addition to the McDonald and Picoult libretto, the show features music and lyrics by such notable writers as Doug Besterman, Zina Goldrich, Marcy Heisler, Rob Rokicki, and Sharon Vaughn. *Breathe: A Musical Theatre Quintet* premiered at Chico State University in November 2020. Subsequently, some or all of these five short chamber musicals have been presented by Tulane University, Ithaca College, and the University of California, Los Angeles (McDonald).

Kait Kerrigan and Brian Lowdermilk created *The Mad Ones* Lab, an online community of theatre makers focused on the development of digital theatre. The Lab provided support and development through online programming and production resources to over 300 participants from across the globe using Kerrigan and Lowdermilk's musical, *The Mad Ones*. Participants created their own digital interpretation of a section of the musical, and through the creation of a unique web application, online audiences can watch a full production via The Mad Ones Engine, which selectively and randomly organizes the segments submitted by participants into 2.5-billion variations of the complete show (Fisher). Kait Kerrigan offered, "Theatre-making feels both endangered and vital right now. We're not interested in a scarcity of resources or competition. We want to raise up new voices and learn from each other. We want to be a part of figuring out what it means to make digital theater."

PUTTING SMALL MUSICALS TO WORK: A CASE STUDY

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, I decided to search for two- and three-person musicals, fifteen to thirty minutes in length. Because I had mostly female students enrolled in the workshop, I looked for shows with gender-neutral roles. Unfortunately, many shows from

GOLDRICH & HEISLER: SHOWBIZ AND FAIRY TALES | September 2020
Anderson University
Direction by David Coolidge
Music Direction by Fritz Robertson
Choreography by Kenny Shepard
Set Design by Eric Reiberg
Costume Design by Michele Mullins
Lighting Design by Eric Reiberg
Sound Design by Kris Rinas and Bailey McBride
Photography by Jack Lugar/Blackbird Media Lab

commercial licensors did not fit these parameters. Therefore, as previously mentioned, I investigated independent licensing options and new, unrepresented musicals.

BMI Workshop's Artistic Coordinator, Frederick Fryer, connected me with eight alumni writing teams to ask if they had any finished or unfinished projects from their time in the program or other small works that had not yet been produced. These creators subsequently provided libretti for my perusal. In order to involve the students in the selection process, I asked them to read the works and present rationales for the pieces they thought we should produce.

Students selected the following pieces:

- **A Piece of Sky, music by Clay Zambo, book and lyrics by Susan Murry**
A Piece of Sky originated as part of Fairfield Center Stage's, 26-Hour Playathon.

- **The Eyes of Vienna, music by Joshua Cerdenia, book and lyrics by Kara Cutruzzula**
The Eyes of Vienna originated at "Across a Crowded Room," a workshop hosted by the New York Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center in the summer of 2019.
- **Fables, music by Dimitri Landrain, book and lyrics by A.J. Freeman**
Fables is a collection of five Aesop fables and runs approximately 60 minutes. Each show has two, gender-flexible roles. *Fables* was developed in part through a writing residency with the 92nd Street Y in New York City. A live performance at the Lincoln Center Library for the Performing Arts was scheduled for April 2020 and subsequently cancelled due to COVID-19.

In total, we selected nine small musicals and projects: three chamber musicals from *Breathe: A Musical Theatre Quintet*; three pieces from *Fables: A Piece of Sky*; *The Eyes of Vienna*; and scenes from *The Mad Ones*. Licensing agreements regarding royalties, material fees, and streaming permissions were negotiated directly between the creators and Tulane University.

We rehearsed all of these two- and three-person musicals online and in person while following all safety protocols, including masks, face shields, social distancing, and COVID-19 testing by the University. In-person rehearsals were conducted outdoors—some at Tulane's Yulman Football Stadium. As singing of any kind (even masked) was restricted indoors, the Office of the General Counsel at Tulane University gave special permission to allow the shows to be performed indoors without masks in front of a socially-spaced audience of fifteen in Dixon Hall, a 950-seat auditorium. Because we wanted the creators, parents, friends, and faculty to see the students' work, we filmed a live performance of each show that streamed at a later date.

To limit the number of people on stage, we performed all nine shows with pre-recorded backing tracks. Some of the creators provided backing tracks from their previous readings and demos, and a staff accompanist created the remaining tracks. The writers generously allowed (and in some cases provided) transpositions of specific songs for the gender-neutral roles. The creators also agreed to meet with the casts via Zoom, which personalized the experience for the students as they were able to interact, ask questions, and discuss the development of the shows.

In an attempt to limit contact time and due to the limited availability of the performance hall (because of instructional, COVID-related, social-distancing needs), we abbreviated the technical rehearsal period to one evening in order to set lighting cues and work with the minimal set elements. Accordingly, we decided to collaborate with our digital media production department and record *Fables* outdoors,

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Photography by Wendy Mutz



which provided a better setting for the elements and animals portrayed in the stories and gave students an opportunity to create digital theatre projects. Digital media students assisted with the filming and editing of all shows, which significantly lessened the workload of the faculty.

Finally, even with students adhering to daily testing and the University making considerable efforts to keep viral spread to a minimum, Tulane experienced a COVID-19 outbreak two weeks prior to filming. Among the infected were three company members who were subsequently quarantined as well as one student who was contact traced and quarantined. Due to quarantine protocols, one COVID-19 positive student and the contact-traced student were isolated for a period extending beyond the filming date. In order to accommodate these students and include their projects, they filmed their material from remote locations, and we took special measures to compile and edit the footage.

PRODUCING A SHOW DURING THE COVID-19 ERA ASKS US TO BE INNOVATIVE AND CREATIVE...

Following filming and post-production work, we parceled the shows into three events and streamed them over a series of evenings in mid-December under the title, The Tulane Chamber Musical Festival. As per our licensing agreements, the shows were streamed admission free on the Tulane Musical Theatre Workshop's YouTube channel and removed after the final performance.

As an educator, the experience presented several challenges. In some cases, the students had difficulty learning their material, especially the music. This could have been because of the lack of practice facilities due to COVID-19 restrictions. Also, due to limited in-person rehearsals, more responsibility was placed on the students to prepare the material on their own and find opportunities outside of rehearsal to work safely with their castmates. This proved challenging due to the students' increased workload with online classes and a lack of approved facilities to safely meet and rehearse.

On a positive note, with so many of the students' classes being held online, they were eager to rehearse in person and have some social interaction even with social-distancing protocols. They were also enthusiastic about working on the newer shows and embracing the challenge of creating characters without being influenced by a cast recording or video content on the internet. Overall, I deemed the project a great success for the workshop and the Tulane musical theatre program.

With so many variables and concerns to consider, this pandemic demands that we—as directors, choreographers, music directors, producers, and most importantly, educators—reevaluate the educational benefit we are trying to achieve through musical theatre production. Although there might be numerous technological challenges, this unique situation can offer opportunities for collaboration between other departments beyond music, theatre, and dance. While the added faculty workload of preparing online instruction and dealing with the complexities of a hybrid situation can be daunting, engaging more student participation in the production process can alleviate some of the pressures created by these unprecedented teaching measures. And most importantly, producing a show during the COVID-19 era asks us to be innovative and creative—both important concepts we are teaching in our classes.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, musical theatre programs should take pride in presenting content of any kind through whatever delivery system works best given the circumstances. Many programs might be faced with coronavirus precautions and limited financial or technological resources that make presenting a medium- or large-scale work impossible. This unprecedented time in theatre

education can present a wonderful opportunity for programs to be flexible and creatively address these challenges in musical theatre performance through the innovative and diverse repertoire from creators of small musicals. The small musical repertoire offers viable and valuable educational options for in-person and virtual performances during the COVID-19 pandemic.

SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

Arizona State University (Brian DeMaris), Baldwin Wallace University (Victoria Bussert), Ball State University (André Garner), Baylor University (Guilherme Almeida), Belmont University (Nancy Allen), Binghamton University (Tommy Iafate), Boise State University (Richard Klautsch), Boston Conservatory (Thomas Gregg, Scott Edmiston), Brigham Young University (Nathan Balsler), Carnegie Mellon University (Catherine Moore), Chapman College (Wilson Mendieta), Chico State University (Matthew Teague Miller), Columbia College Chicago (Amy Uhl), Fairmont State University (Troy Snyder), Florida State University (Kate Gelabert), Illinois Wesleyan University (Scott Susong), James Madison University (Jacob Brent), Kennesaw State University (Timothy Ellis, Amanda Wansa Morgan), Marymount Manhattan College (Jill Stevenson), Oklahoma City University (Karen Coe Miller), Pace University (Laurie Brown Kindred, JV Mercanti), Point Park University (Kim Martin), Rider University (Robin Lewis), San Diego State University (Stephen Brotebeck), Texas Christian University (Harry Parker, Jessica Humphrey), Texas State University (Kaitlin Hopkins), Texas Tech University (Dean Nolan), Trinity University (Nathan Stith), Tulane University (Michael McKelvey), University of Alabama (Stacy Alley), University of Alabama at Birmingham (Valerie Accetta), University of the Arts (Katie Donovan, Lindsay Cram), University of Central Florida (Earl Weaver), University of Hartford (Tracey Moore), University of Michigan (Linda Goodrich, Vince Cardinal), University of Northern Colorado (Ryan Driscoll), University of Oklahoma (Ashton Byrum), Weber State University (Andrew Barratt Lewis), West Virginia University (Jeremiah Downes), and Wright State University (Joe Deer)

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