

# The musical theatre

## Early musical theatre

In the past, ancient Greek and Roman plays included songs and dance. The Middle Ages brought travelling **minstrels** and musical morality plays staged in churches and, by the 1700s, *opera*, or the use of singers and orchestras to tell a story, became popular in Italy, France, Germany and Great Britain. The musical as we know it, has its roots in the French and Viennese Operettas of the 1800s and it was in New York City that the success of *The Black Crook* (1860) opened the way for the development of the American musical.

## Broadway

Broadway, the famous street in Manhattan, has been associated with American theatrical activity since 1735, when the first theatre opened there. During the 1950s, Broadway staged great stories, told with memorable songs and dances that became unforgettable hits such as *My Fair Lady* (1956) and *West Side Story* (1957).

The range of subjects widened in the 1960s and youth culture was celebrated in the rock musical *Hair* (1967). In the 1970s, dance became the central element in musicals such as *Grease* (1971), *Chicago* (1975) and *Dancin'* (1978). In the



1980s, the public began to love mega-musicals, so this decade brought to Broadway a succession of long-running “British hits” such as *Cats* or *Starlight Express*, which were full of special effects.

## Andrew Lloyd Webber

The British Andrew Lloyd Webber was the most commercially successful **purveyor** of musical theatre during the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, notably with *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1971), *Evita* (1978), *Cats* (1981), *Phantom of the Opera* (1986), and *Sunset Boulevard* (1993). His influence can be traced in the musicals of other productions such as *Les Misérables* (1980 French production; 1985 English production) and *Miss Saigon* (1989), which were among the most popular stage shows of the 1980s.

## New trends for the new millennium

By the 1990s, new mega-musicals were no longer winning over the public, and costs were too high while revivals and long runs of original work could be extremely profitable: *Cats* closed in 2000 after a run of 7,485 performances, and *A Chorus Line* (1975), *Les Misérables*, and *Phantom of the Opera* had all surpassed 5,000 performances by the turn of the century.

Films such as *Hairspray* (2007), *The Lion King* (1997), and *The Color Purple* (2004) **provided** another source for today’s composers: **roughly** one-third of the current Broadway musicals are based on films or classic literature such as *Little Women* (2005) and *Dracula* (2001).

**minstrel:** *menestrello*  
**to provide:** *fornire*  
**purveyor:** *dispensatore*  
**roughly:** *approssimativamente*

**1**  Read the text and complete the chart.

Title of the musical	Year of production
1. ....	1860
2. My Fair Lady	.....
3. West Side Story	.....
4. ....	1967
5. Grease – Jesus Christ Superstar	.....
6. ....	1975
7. Dancin' – Evita	.....
8. ....	1980/1985
9. Cats	.....
10. Miss Saigon	.....
11. ....	1986
12. Sunset Boulevard	.....

**2**  Answer the questions.

1. What did ancient Greek and Roman comedies include?
2. What happened during the Middle Ages?
3. What is the opera genre?
4. Where did the musical have its roots?
5. Why was the musical *The Black Crook* important?
6. Why is Broadway associated with theatrical activity?
7. What kind of musicals did the audience love in the 1980s?
8. Why were mega-musicals no longer successful in the 1990s?
9. Where can today's composers find their source of inspiration?



3



Read the text and choose the best option for each gap.

***Phantom of the Opera, Love Behind the Mask***

The story of a young chorus girl, Christine - a talented singer who, with the right tutor,

**1.** ..... becomes world famous. While rehearsing at the Opera House in Paris, where inexplicable **2.** ....., she captures the attention and the heart of The Phantom,

**3.** ..... the Opera Ghost. But he is not a real ghost – he **4.** ..... a disfigured musical genius who has hidden **5.** ..... for years to avoid the cruel stares of strangers.

With the Phantom's **6.** ....., Christine becomes the opera's leading **7.** .....

but tragedy is near as the young soprano has fallen in **8.** ..... with the handsome noble Viscount Raoul De Chagny, not realizing the Phantom is deeply in love **9.** ..... her.

Insane with jealousy and unable to see the object of his affection in the arms of another man, the

Phantom kidnaps Christine - unaware **10.** ..... Raoul is prepared to get her back. In the

end, the Phantom realizes that the happiness of Christine is with Raoul and not with him so, with an act of love, he lets her go.

- |                       |                   |                   |                   |
|-----------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| <b>1. a.</b> would    | <b>b.</b> could   | <b>c.</b> won't   | <b>d.</b> is      |
| <b>2. a.</b> subjects | <b>b.</b> matters | <b>c.</b> things  | <b>d.</b> topics  |
| <b>3. a.</b> or       | <b>b.</b> and     | <b>c.</b> so      | <b>d.</b> but     |
| <b>4. a.</b> are      | <b>b.</b> is      | <b>c.</b> was     | <b>d.</b> has     |
| <b>5. a.</b> behind   | <b>b.</b> far     | <b>c.</b> under   | <b>d.</b> away    |
| <b>6. a.</b> work     | <b>b.</b> plan    | <b>c.</b> help    | <b>d.</b> project |
| <b>7. a.</b> singer   | <b>b.</b> dancer  | <b>c.</b> actress | <b>d.</b> teacher |
| <b>8. a.</b> hate     | <b>b.</b> like    | <b>c.</b> mind    | <b>d.</b> love    |
| <b>9. a.</b> to       | <b>b.</b> with    | <b>c.</b> at      | <b>d.</b> for     |
| <b>10. a.</b> that    | <b>b.</b> which   | <b>c.</b> who     | <b>d.</b> when    |