
In partial fulfilment of the requirements for

Honours in Theatre and Drama

Murdoch University

by

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This thesis is presented for the Honours degree in Theatre and Drama Studies at Murdoch University, 2012.

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ABSTRACT

Musical Theatre has long suffered the stigma of being perceived as a low form of art by scholars and critics alike. Derived from popular forms of entertainment such as revue and vaudeville, the musical is still dismissed by many as a frivolous form of entertainment. This has led to a lack of critical literature which explores the serious dramatic potential of this genre and the ways in which elements such as music and movement can be used not only to drive the narrative, but also to create a more layered and nuanced understanding of the characters and plot. The use of these conventions can also be said to have directly influenced the evolution of the ‘integrated musical’ where dance, song and the action are (ideally) used equally to assist the storytelling process with no single aspect overshadowing the others.

While the importance of song and dialogue cannot be denied, it is the inherently physical nature of dance which makes it perhaps the most fascinating (and difficult) to study. Unlike its counterparts, dance does not require words to tell a story. There are many instances where this has been exploited to marvellous effect in the musical genre, however in order to explore this phenomenon I have performed a case study of two important ‘integrated’ choreographic works. The first of these is “Night and Day” from The Gay Divorcee (1934) with the second being the dream ballet “Laurey Makes Up Her Mind” from Oklahoma! (1955)\(^1\). Both of these numbers are arguably important in the development and history of the integrated musical through their use of dance. In addition, the work done by their respective choreographers has greatly influenced my own practical research, comprising of the creation of choreography for two very different productions, a musical adaption of Shakespeare’s Twelfth Night and an original, collaborative piece Gesamtkunstwerk.

\(^1\) Due to the lack of footage from the original stage shows I have chosen dance numbers from stage musicals which were then adapted for the screen by their respective choreographers and retain much of the original choreography.
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