

## Musical Theatre - Context and Background Facts

Musicals use singing, dancing, and talking to tell stories. They are meant to be entertaining and are usually lighter and funnier than opera. They have easy melodies – audiences could sing along.

They usually have an **orchestra** to accompany the singers, but many musicals today also have **rock instruments** such as electric guitars, synthesisers and drumkits.

**Early** musicals were influenced by jazz and swing music while lots of musicals from the **1970s onwards** used rock music.

The types of musicals that are around today began in the **1920s** and developed into the **21<sup>st</sup> Century**.



The genre started out on **Broadway**, a famous theatre street in New York. Later ones were shown in London's **West End**.

Some songs from Musicals have **hit the charts** such as Evita's "Don't Cry For Me Argentina" and "Memory" from Cats.

Many musicals have been made into **popular musical films**: The Sound of Music, Hairspray, Grease, Billy Elliot, Mamma Mia and Les Misérables, Rent, Annie and West Side Story are just a few.

Musicals are usually written in the styles of the popular music that is around at the time. For example, **Hamilton**, which premiered in 2015, draws on elements of **hip hop**, as well as **R&B**, **pop**, **soul**, and **traditional-style show tunes**.



### Types of Musicals:

**Book Musical** (A musical with a story), **Concept Musical** (the idea or concept is more important than the plot – A Chorus Line), **Jukebox Musical** (Popular songs by one artist; We Will Rock You, Mamma Mia), **Rock Musical** (uses rock music).

# MUSICAL THEATRE

## Knowledge Organiser

### Voice Types

There are 4 main different voice types we need to be able to recognise. Each voice type is based on how high or low the singer can sing.

**Soprano** – a **HIGH** female voice.



**Alto** – a **LOW** female voice.



**Tenor** – a **HIGH** male voice.



**Bass** – a **LOW** male voice.



### Song Types found in Musicals

**Solo:** A solo is a song sung by only one character. Solo songs are often deeply meaningful and give an insight into what the character is thinking and feeling in the moment.



**Duet:** Duets are songs sung by 2 characters. These often include vocal harmonies and question and answer phrasing to suggest a certain relationship or conversation between the two characters.

**Chorus:** Chorus songs are often (but not always) the big, catchy songs that show what the musical is about. These are usually sung by the chorus in the show or, quite often, everyone in the cast. Chorus numbers often open or close the different acts and show major changes that affect a large number of characters.

**Ensemble:** Ensemble songs are usually sung by a group of the main characters. The group size can range anywhere from 3 to about 10 singers. Often different characters will have solo lines within the song, but the whole ensemble will come together to sing the chorus.

### Singing Techniques

There are also various singing techniques.

Two are most used in musicals; these are:

**Falsetto** – A man adapting his voice to sing higher than his normal range.

**Belting** – A forced style of singing that gives power and a fuller sound to the note.



### Key Words

**Dance Break:** included in a song for a dance routine.

**Libretto:** the words and lyrics to a musical.

**Word Painting:** Often used where the music reflects the words.

**Sung-Through:** A musical where all the dialogue is sung. (eg. Miss Saigon)

**Hook:** a line of the song that sticks in the audience's head.

**Triple Threat:** Someone who can sing, dance and act.

**Overture:** The music to open the show, often a mix of the best songs in the show.

**Important Composers and their Musicals:** Gilbert & Sullivan 1842-1900 (The Mikado, HMS Pinafore), Cole Porter 1891-1964 (Anything Goes, Kiss Me Kate), Rodgers & Hammerstein 1895-1960 (Sound of Music, Oklahoma, Carousel), Leonard Bernstein 1918-1990 (West Side Story) Stephen Sondheim 1930 (Sweeney Todd, Into the Woods), Jerry Herman 1931-2019 (Hello Dolly), Schonberg & Bouill 1941 (Les Misérables, Miss Saigon) Andrew Lloyd Webber 1948 (Joseph & the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat, Evita, Cats, Phantom of the Opera) Alan Menken 1949 (Little Shop of Horrors) Stephen Schwartz 1948 (Godspell, Wicked).



