

Musicals

A musical can be defined as something that combines dance, singing and drama. The first musicals were derived from a mix of opera and ballet, operettas. "The Black Crook", 1866, is classed as the first musical. A lot of musicals are based on Shakespeare's plays. For example, "West Side Story" is based around "Romeo and Juliet", and "Kiss Me, Kate" around "Taming of the Shrew". Here are some of the more memorable musicals in history.

In 1923 L. Frank Baum adapted THE WIZARD OF OZ, originally the well known film with Judy Garland for the stage, with memorable make-up and settings, but a different story to the one that is so well known.

The biggest hit of 1934 was ANYTHING GOES with its Cole Porter hits "You're the Top" and "I Get a Kick Out of You"(later sung by Frank Sinatra).

OKLAHOMA!, one of the most famous film musicals, opened in 1943 and ran for over 2000 performances in New York, and changed American musicals forever. Its music was sophisticated and innovative, and it gave us the very well known songs "People Will Say We're in Love" and "Oh, What a Beautiful Morning".

Rodgers and Hammerstein's CAROUSEL, in 1945, introduced a new solemn note to the musical, with the unforgettable song "You'll Never Walk Alone" (later recorded by many artists, now a Liverpool football anthem).

The recently re-opened KISS ME KATE opened in 1948, written around Shakespeare's THE TAMING OF THE SHREW.

In 1949, SOUTH PACIFIC, based on two James Michener stories, gave us the songs "Younger than Springtime" and "I'm Gonna Wash That Man Right Outta My Hair." It won the Pulitzer Prize.

The hit show GUYS AND DOLLS, by Frank Loesser and George Kaufman, based on the stories of Damon Runyon, spawned the hit song "Luck Be a Lady Tonight", and ran for a little under three years. THE KING AND I opened in 1951 with Gertrude Lawrence as star, but she died during the run.

MY FAIR LADY, with Julie Andrews, established a new Broadway long-run record in 1956. It ran for over six years.

WEST SIDE STORY re-interpreted ROMEO AND JULIET in 1957, and shocked some with its frank brutality, but impressed so many others. It also launched the career of Stephen Sondheim.

After 1957, there was a change in musicals. Dance, drama and music were fused together. This meant that now, when you went to see a musical, you would see all three of these art forms in the musical. WEST SIDE STORY was one of the first musicals to do this. Previously, only two of the three would have been seen in any musical. If we take, for example, the film, THE WIZARD OF OZ, it was mainly, singing, and acting, with very few, simple dance sequences.

Because the musical was so popular, it had to take advantage of any technological advancements. Colour film was used as early as 1929 in musicals, In 1949, acting was fused with animation as Gene Kelly cavorted with Tom and Jerry's Jerry the mouse in the wonderful Mayer's On the Town. Walt Disney's Mary Poppins also made use of such film techniques.

With the development of Technicolor, surround-sound and windscreen musicals began to get more and more sophisticated. It made some people into massive stars through the cinema, including Fred Astaire and Gene Kelly; just two of the many stars still recognised today.

THE SOUND OF MUSIC opened in 1959 with Mary Martin in the lead, and gave us many memorable melodies. It ran for over three years and also gave us a very successful film with Julie Andrews as the star.

OLIVER first shown in 1963, and audiences loved it, especially the ballad "As Long as He Needs Me" and the upbeat "Consider Yourself".

1964 saw FIDDLER ON THE ROOF, an adaptation of the stories by Sholom Aleichem.

The longest run of the 1966-67 season was CABARET, with music and lyrics by John Kander and Fred Ebb; but the show was less successful in London. Of course most people will know this as the film, starring Liza Minnelli, daughter of the film star Judy Garland.

1971 saw JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR by Rice and Webber with Yvonne Elliman as Mary Magdalene.

GREASE opened in 1972, and has been a hit ever since.

Despite its London success, THE ROCKY HORROR SHOW flopped in America.

In 1977, ANNIE was a successful adaptation of the Orphan Annie cartoon strip. Andrew Lloyd Webber still releases musicals today, such as CATS (started 1981). A lot of his productions are also available on video as well.

As we know, a lot of these musicals have been made into films. This is simply just a quick list of musicals on stage. GREASE is one of the most famous and most popular film musicals even today, with its stars Olivia Newton-John and John Travolta going on to become, at least in Travolta's case, major Hollywood stars. Everyone knows the words to SOUND OF MUSIC, and many of today's older stars have been brought to where they are through musicals.