Children, Childhood, and Musical Theater

Bringing together scholars from musicology, literature, childhood studies, and theater, this volume examines the ways in which children’s musicals tap into adult nostalgia for childhood while appealing to the needs and consumer potential of the child. The contributors take up a wide range of musicals, including works inspired by the books of children’s authors such as Roald Dahl, P.L. Travers, and Francis Hodgson Burnett; created by Rodgers and Hammerstein, Lionel Bart, and other leading lights of musical theater; or conceived for a cast made up entirely of children. The collection examines musicals that propagate or complicate normative attitudes regarding what childhood is or should be. It also considers the child performer in movie musicals as well as in professional and amateur stage musicals. This far-ranging collection highlights the special place that musical theater occupies in the imaginations and lives of children as well as adults. The collection comes at a time of increased importance of musical theater in the lives of children and young adults.

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Children, Childhood, and Musical Theater

Edited by
James Leve and Donelle Ruwe

Dedicated to James Quincy Leve
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1 Children, childhood, and musical theater
An introduction

*James Leve and Donelle Ruwe*

The impetus behind this collection is the recognition that musical theater plays an important part in young people’s lives. Paying attention to how children experience musical theater opens up new understandings of musical theater and children’s culture. The intersection of childhood cultural studies and musical theater studies is a new, albeit growing, area of research. Musical theater studies, itself a relatively young field, has produced historical accounts told through the lens of feminism, social history, African American studies, and even religion, but no sustained study that privileges the child has appeared, despite the abundance of musicals for children and musicals about them.

The reasons for the scholarly neglect are historical and cultural. Historically, both children’s literature and musical theater have been viewed as inferior artistic genres. Gender bias lies behind much of the prejudice, for children’s literature and musical theater are both associated with the feminine. As Stacy Wolf, a contributor to this collection, has written, “musical theatre has always been the terrain of women and girls,” and the tastes of women, girls, and children have historically been devalued. Implicit in this bias is the belief that children are incapable of distinguishing good art from bad art. Further, musicals written primarily for children to perform are considered an inferior category of musical theater, seen as childish, local, ephemeral, amateurish, and artistically suspect. Children’s participation in musical theater would seem more appropriate for sociological or educational studies than aesthetic and artistic analysis. However, the educational scholarship about the impact of musical theater on children tends to be anecdotal and offers little measurable data to justify the inclusion of musical theater in the school curriculum beyond the obvious general benefits typically ascribed to arts education.

To paraphrase Peter Hunt’s discussion of children’s literature, if “children” commonly connotes immaturity, and “musical theater” commonly connotes something light and frivolous, as it did for most of its history, then it is no wonder that children’s musical theater has been neglected.

Children’s engagement with musical theater has evolved and increased along with new technologies. Children once enjoyed playing their favorite musicals on records, then CDs, and now MP3 players or the latest...
digital format. Children today have a fluid experience with musical theater, one with greater access and agency. Children around the world experience musicals through sound clips, show-tune mashups, parodies, school and community performances, and doting parents’ uploaded videos of a child’s talent-show rendition of Frozen’s “Do You Want to Build a Snowman?” When the fictional protagonist of Netflix’s Haters Back Off (2016–17), the clueless and talentless Miranda Sings (Coleen Ballinger), posts a YouTube recording of herself singing “Defying Gravity” from Wicked, she is exercising her right as an American kid with a computer to be a musical theater star of her own making. Such moments of hypermediation typify a child’s experiences with musical theater today. Children create their own musical theater forms through processes as varied as fanfiction postings to claymation spoofs on Facebook’s Vine Camera. Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin note that hypermediacy “privileges fragmentation, indeterminacy, and heterogeneity,” and it emphasizes process over performance. For example, the poster in Figure 1.1 of a child’s felt-tipped, coloring marker drawing

Figure 1.1 Jamilton, a Magic-marker pointillism poster by nine-year-old James Quincy Leve. Permission of editors.
Children, childhood, and musical theater

titled “Jamilton” epitomizes children’s musical theater hypermediation as well as a transgressive crossing of disciplines.

At the time the poster was created, the artist, James Quincy, was nine-years-old and a fan of Lin-Manuel Miranda’s *Hamilton*. When he was given an assignment to create a magic-marker pointillism poster for a 4th-grade art class, James Quincy chose to reimagine the poster and Playbill cover of the musical. The iconic image of Alexander Hamilton with a raised gun atop a golden star intersects with James Quincy’s fantasy world “Jamestopia.” He renames the musical *jamilton*, the producer credit reads “a JAMESTOPIA MUSICAL,” the gun is replaced with a “J” flag, and the marquee reads “SJAMES.” In the bottom left corner, a seemingly random image appears (inspired by an internet meme) of a man crying with the word “WHY!!” within a dialogue bubble. Pointillism, Playbill, theater elements (the marquee), and internet memes are remediated, appearing in a single vibrant image.

Our essay collection analyzes musicals as literary works as well as performance texts and sites of social practice. The ten contributors explore Broadway musicals and movie musicals that feature professional child actors as well as musicals written for children to perform in non-commercial (i.e., amateur theater) venues. We look at musical adaptations of children’s books. We also consider musical theater in the context of young adult audiences and performers. Musicals embraced by children, whether they qualify as “children’s musicals,” figure large in this volume, but they are only one facet of our discussion. We are equally concerned with what the discursive practice of musical theater has to say about childhood and the child. The range of essays in this book, therefore, reflects the complexity of the topic and the intrinsic interdisciplinary nature of children’s studies and musical theater studies. The contributors examine real children as performers and as audience members, as well as idealized children as they are constructed in musical theater texts and productions. The collection recognizes that “doing” musical theater (writing musicals, performing in them, going to them, purchasing recordings of them, and blogging about them) is part of the cultural work of constructing childhood.

The term “children’s musical” lacks a formal, universally accepted definition. Is it a musical written for children to watch, or is it a musical written for children to perform? Do musicals with only one or two parts for children, or those featuring children in leading roles such as *Billy Elliot the Musical* (2005) and *Matilda the Musical* (2010), count if those musicals are primarily directed to adult audiences? The term “children’s musical” appears in no index of a major musical theater history book, and there is little musicological research on children’s musical theater as of yet. Commercial producers avoid the term “children’s musicals” at all cost, lest they scare away adults, the primary ticket buyers. If by “children’s musical” one means something intended exclusively for children, then children’s musical theater is essentially an amateur phenomenon. However, commercial Broadway musicals are
now available in simplified child performance versions. Moreover, parents take their children to the full range of commercial musicals and not just those explicitly marketed to children.

One of our first tasks, then, is to clarify what scholars mean by “children’s musicals.” This deceptively simple term leads quickly to contested terms, beginning with the complicated and unanswerable question of “what is a child?” For the purposes of this collection, we identify three broad, overlapping categories of children’s musical theater: the children’s musical, family musical, and young adult musical. The children’s musical, we argue, exists primarily in the world of amateur, non-commercial theater. It is written for children (pre-school and elementary school age) to perform or to be performed for them. The children’s musical includes both children’s theater (plays presented for child audiences) and “creative dramatics” or “recreational drama” (theater performed by children with the goal of experiential learning and child development). By contrast, the family musical is a commercial genre that appeals to both children and adults. The family musical is associated with the Rodgers and Hammerstein model and strongly appeals to the middle class. The family musical is such a core part of the canon that it is essentially synonymous with “mainstream musical.” Since children lack the means to attend Broadway theater on their own, most Broadway musicals considered “children’s musicals” are in fact family musicals. Family movie musicals such as State Fair (1945, 1962), The Music Man (1962), Mary Poppins (1964), The Sound of Music (1965), Chitty Chitty Bang Bang (1968), and Bedknobs and Broomsticks (1971) reached a massive audience that crossed generational lines. These musicals celebrate the heteronormative family and often affirm the father’s centrality within the family. As children’s literature scholar Ian Wojcik-Andrews notes, “most ‘children’s’ films are actually family films.” The young adult musical is one of the fastest growing segments of the musical theater industry. It is highly commercial (unlike the children’s musical), but unlike similarly commercial family musicals, young adult musicals speak to the sexual and social concerns of teens and young adults. While “young adult literature” is a thriving category of literary analysis, there is no musical theater equivalent as of yet, even though in practice the “young adult musical” is a very profitable genre as evidenced by Wicked (2003) and Dear Evan Hansen (2016).

The children’s musical

It is safe to say that no Broadway musical has ever been written exclusively for children. Society defines the child as immature, inexperienced, and dependent upon adults. By extension, children’s musicals have generally been judged to be immature and unsophisticated. While scholars analyze theater for adults in terms of aesthetics, entertainment value, and theater history, theater for children evokes “an aesthetics of pedagogy as much as art.”
In the world of children’s musical theater, the distinction between high and low artistic status lies between commercial (i.e., works such as *Annie*) and amateur musicals, such as those designed purely for children’s amateur performances (e.g., *The Christmas Bus* and *Bullies in the Hall*). Commercial musical theater often targets young audiences but virtually never without serious consideration of the adults who will accompany these children to the theater. In a larger sense, musicals about childhood, such as *Caroline, or Change* (2003) and *Fun Home* (2015), or musicals based on children’s books, such as *Cats* (1981) and *The Secret Garden* (1991), appeal as much, if not more, to adults than to children.

It might be best to consider only those musicals written expressly for children to perform in amateur, educational, and community theater venues as children’s musicals—in other words, musicals that no adults other than parents, friends, family, and teachers will attend. Our contributor Lauren Acton discusses the writing and performance of a group of such musicals in her essay about musical theater writers in Canada who have carved out a career creating musicals for school settings, summer camps, church groups, and other community theater venues. These writers take into account the performance abilities of children. For example, a summer-camp musical needs multiple speaking parts and multiple ensemble songs, a positive theme, and, as Acton reminds us, a limited vocal range in order to accommodate children’s voices. In recent years, amateur musical theater for children has been dominated by child-friendly adaptations of commercial musicals such as *Aladdin* and *Seussical*. Stacy Wolf’s contribution to this collection examines the process by which major leasing organizations abridge and then market Broadway musicals—especially Disney shows—for children to perform. Unlike amateur musicals created with children’s vocal and acting needs in mind, in these shows, the vocal range of the music, which was originally written for trained (mostly adult) professionals, is inappropriate for and potentially damaging to immature voices.

The source material can help determine whether or not a work is a children’s musical. However, musicals based on children’s books are not necessarily children’s musicals. In fact, they are often written to appeal first and foremost to adults. For example, Marsha Norman and Lucy Simon’s *The Secret Garden* includes a tragic love triangle that was not in the original text. *Cats* emphasizes adult angst in songs such as “Memories.” *Into the Woods* features very mature content, just as did the original tales as collected by the Brothers Grimm. Nevertheless, as Stacy Wolf reminds us, *Into the Woods* was the first Broadway musical that MTI singled out for their new “Broadway JR.” series (although it was not the first “JR.” adaptation to be released, and ultimately it was labeled as a “School Edition”).

Perhaps defining the term “children’s musical” is a fool’s errand, given the variety of ways that children experience musical theater and how musicals construct and reinforce ideologies of childhood. One could even argue that the label “children’s musical” is a marketing term rather than an
artistic category. The licensing company Pioneer Drama Service offers the following promotional blurb:

When you pair the wonder and magic of children’s theater with the fun and excitement of quality music, you have the perfect hybrid of children’s musicals, sometimes referred to as children’s theater musicals. Producing one of our musicals for young audiences creates a wonderful experience for any school, community theater or professional theater wanting to give children a magical experience. Whether your production group is comprised of children, teens or adults, you’ll find the perfect children’s musical here!12

In other words, the children’s musical is almost anything that a company thinks will appeal to any potential market.

The family musical

Perry Nodelman has argued that the “hidden adult” is omnipresent in children’s texts in that adult needs and desires are constituent elements of every adult-created work for children.13 In musical theater, the adult is in plain sight. An adult occupies the seat next to a child, and adults direct and choreograph the child’s performance. Children’s musicals on Broadway are really family musicals, for a successful show must appeal to parents as well as children. Jacqueline Rose’s argument that children’s literature “sets up a world in which the adult comes first (author, maker, giver) and the child comes after (reader, product, receiver)” is especially true of the family musical.14

Rebecca Warner has recently attempted to define the “family musical” by identifying its multi-generational appeal, constitutive elements, and market appeal.15 Warner tacitly accepts the generic label “family musical” and suggests that this genre must be analyzed with close attention to the shared adult–child experience of going to a musical. To quote scholar James Bohn on Disney animated films:

family entertainment has a transgenerational appeal…Parents often want their children to see the same films they enjoyed in their youth. As children grow up, they begin to make their own choices concerning ticket purchases; thus, this sort of generational bonding over movies is most commonly reserved for family entertainment. For this reason, each successive generation is exposed to animated Disney features, some of which are more than seventy years old.16

While children experience musicals for the first time, adults who accompany children to the theater experience nostalgia for childhood along with “a sense of communion through shared discovery, which is also reflected
in the show itself" (646). Adults reconnect with their inner child, and the child connects with the adult and with the theater-going experience. In her contribution to this collection, Helen Freshwater discusses how the title character in Matilda the Musical plays against adult fantasies of the child as a nostalgic figure of innocence. Matilda acts like an adult, while the actual adults in her life exhibit childish and childlike qualities. As Freshwater explains, Matilda was deliberately designed to appeal to crossover adult audiences by evoking adult desires to get in touch with “the inner child.”

Commercial, mainstream musical theater traditionally centers on the marriage trope. By contrast, children’s books rarely follow romance plot conventions. Few commercial family musicals (or musicals about or for children) present kiddie romance. Instead, adult romance (if present) is part of a family dynamic: for example, in Bedknobs and Broomsticks, Professor Emilius Browne accepts, simultaneously, his roles as a father figure, husband material, and protector of his country (he enlists in the British army). Family musicals participate in the overarching themes of the romance plot in that they belong within the broad category, “the genres of social integration.” In such genres, social institutions (families, schools, and communities) are affirmed, and threats to social institutions are removed. Matilda’s closing scenes, for example, restore both family and school (and thereby society) when Matilda creates a new home with Miss Honey, and Miss Honey becomes the new headmistress of the school.

The rise of the “family musical” begins with Rodgers and Hammerstein and a particular configuration of the post-WWII American middle class. Characterized by a celebration of patriarchal, often small-town values and the American belief in ingenuity, hard work, and clean fun, family musicals such as Brigadoon (1947) and The Music Man (1957) offered entertainment for the whole family, and musical theater became mainstream popular entertainment, reaching a broad audience through recordings, film, and television. Films such as Singin’ in the Rain (1952), Mary Poppins (1964), and The Sound of Music (1965) captivated audiences of all ages. Interestingly, the so-called “adult musical” (such as the long-running erotic revue Oh! Calcutta!) exists in a binary relationship with the family musical rather than with the children’s musical. Elizabeth L. Wollman has argued that the opposite of the “adult musical” is “mainstream” musical theater, which consists of musicals devoid of explicit sexual content and other adult subjects. In effect, the binary opposition that Wollman establishes is not adult/child but rather adult/family.17

As contributors William Everett and Raymond Knapp both explore, family musicals are deeply rooted in a patriarchal understanding of the family. Everett traces the influence of Dr. Spock’s approach to parenting on the family musical’s construction of the idealized family in Mary Poppins, Chitty Chitty Bang Bang, and Bedknobs and Broomsticks. Knapp examines how musicals from the World War II era reflect America’s concern with re-establishing the role of the father, and he then traces how
the construction of the father evolves over the latter half of the twentieth century. Ryan Bunch’s essay examines how *The Sound of Music* presents female adolescence within a family dynamic and also reflects different philosophies of child development and education.

Television played an important role in the fifties and sixties in spreading the popularity of musical theater to a broad audience across America. The networks broadcast live studio versions of Broadway musicals such as *Peter Pan* (NBC, 1955) and commissioned new works specifically for television, with Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *Cinderella* (1957) being the most famous and successful example. The 2013 Broadway adaptation of this version of *Cinderella* currently ranks among the most produced musicals in high schools. In 2013, NBC produced a live telecast of *The Sound of Music* starring country-music star Carrie Underwood in the role of Maria and has produced one live musical annually ever since.

Today, the family musical is a juggernaut of commercial theater and is associated with the Disney invasion of Broadway. The extraordinary success of the stage versions of *Beauty and the Beast*, *The Lion King*, and *Aladdin*, for example, made the family musical a lynchpin of the rejuvenation of the Times Square area, and Disney musicals monopolize community theater and school productions across America. The Disney imprimatur automatically implies that a musical is family oriented. As Thomas Schumacher, a theatrical producer and the president of the Disney Theatrical Group, acknowledges, Disney deliberately reaches for a much broader demographic than children. A survey that Disney conducted of its Broadway audience revealed that only 30% of sales were for groups that included children. Schumacher concluded that Disney was not in the business of creating Broadway shows for children. Instead, “you have to figure out, what is my grown-up idea at the core of this?” In fact, Schumacher discourages parents from bringing small children to Disney musicals on Broadway since the musicals are “too late at night and ... too long,” and “not made” for children. Disney recognizes that Broadway musicals should be distinguished from children’s musical theater, and it markets to adults first and foremost, and then to children who come with their families.

**The young adult musical**

The young adult musical is a growing phenomenon in youth culture. Musical theater studies has never explicitly differentiated young adult musical theater from children’s musical theater, but in practice, young adult musicals are a distinct and growing category. Musicals that appeal especially to this demographic (e.g., *Wicked*, *Spring Awakening*, and *Dear Evan Hansen*) attract adults, but the subject matter and the musical idioms (pop, rock, rap, hip hop) appeal to teens and young adults. In some cases, the driving force behind the creation of a musical is a teenage fan base. For example, in the case of the musical *Newsies* (2012), as Marah Gubar writes in her essay
about politics and musical theater, the teenage fans of the original Disney movie made the development of a Broadway version a lucrative priority.

In children’s literature studies, “children’s literature” and “young adult literature” have long been distinguished, even if the precise boundaries are contested. In sociological approaches to youth studies, the young adult is a subject-in-process, neither child nor adult, but always in the process of becoming. The young adult differs from the child and the adult in terms of struggles, possibilities, desires, and needs. Like children, young adults are also a vulnerable group. They often exhibit disillusionment and rebellion, independence coupled with a yearning to belong. Literary scholars suggest that young adult literature features characters who deal explicitly with issues of sex, identity, and societal pressure. Young adult literature often centers on the struggle to negotiate the levels of power in social institutions, and it features protagonists who confront social injustice and recognize that injustice is a fact of life. The young adult musical Spring Awakening (based on Frank Wedekind’s 1891 play) presents teenage students who struggle with sexuality and impending adulthood; and rather than offer a happy ending, it involves suicide, incest, a botched abortion leading to death, and adults whose rigidity forces young adults into self-destructive choices. By contrast, early family musicals about teenagers (e.g., Bye Bye Birdie [1960]) spoof teenage romance and rock and roll culture rather than seriously explore the sexual, emotional, and social realities of adolescence.

Like Broadway, television and film industries are capitalizing on young adult appetite for musical theater. Popular movies and TV shows emphasizing group singing in school settings include the Pitch Perfect films and the Disney High School Musical trilogy. The writer David Kamp refers to the increase in student interest in singing and musical theater as the “Glee effect,” linking renewed interest in musical theater to the popular television series Glee, which uses performance as a means of personal realization and empowerment. Kamp notes that for today’s tweens and teens, “being a musical theatre nerd is cool and socially acceptable.” Musical theater can offer young adults something beyond pure aesthetic pleasure; it offers a community.

The historical context of children’s musical theater

The history of early musical theater for children intersects with the history of the American Children’s Theater movement, although the subcategory of musical theater within that movement is mostly unexplored. The first major children’s theater organization, The Children’s Educational Theatre, was founded in New York in 1903, and in the 1910s and 1920s, the Junior Leagues of America were the primary sponsors of children’s theater. During the Depression, the Federal Theatre Project (part of the Workers Progress Administration) supported children’s theater throughout America. Its best known production for child audiences is Yasha Frank’s musical play
Pinocchio, which premiered in California in 1937 (where Walt Disney saw it), played in theaters across America, and opened on Broadway in 1938. The Broadway musical theater repertory includes few major child roles prior to the 1940s. In the early part of the twentieth century, Broadway offered multiple extravaganzas featuring children, such as the British import Humpty Dumpty (1904), which included 50 children in its cast of 200. It is difficult to fully assess the performances of children in extravaganzas and early Broadway musicals, if only because original cast albums do not exist of early shows. Child characters in musicals either functioned as ornaments on an otherwise adult-oriented story, or they lent sentimental value, especially in works centered on the family. For instance, the character Kim in Oscar Hammerstein and Jerome Kern’s Show Boat (1927) serves an important dramatic function, but her role is very small. Kim’s presence carries strong sentimental value, and in her major scene with her father, Ravenal, in the original version, she is passive, an object upon which Ravenal projects his emotions.

During the Rodgers and Hammerstein era, when musical theater moved toward family-oriented entertainment, children became more central to musical theater story lines, although vocal solos for child actors were rare, and writers and producers were reluctant to make demands on child actors. Enock and Carrie Snow’s children in Carousel are present physically but not vocally. Children on Broadway were given few lines to sing by themselves, let alone an entire solo. When children did sing solos, their songs were typically diegetic (songs written into the plot as songs). Children’s diegetic songs include “Dites-Moi,” sung by Emile de Becque’s children in South Pacific (1949); “May We Entertain You?” performed in Baby June’s and Louise’s vaudeville act in Gypsy (1959); and “So Long, Farewell,” performed for adults by the von Trapp children in The Sound of Music (1959). The Music Man (1957) stands out in that young Winthrop has a pivotal role in both the book song “The Wells Fargo Wagon” and the diegetic “Gary, Indiana.” Early musicals, in other words, rarely center on a child protagonist, one who holds dramatic focus and commands considerable stage time and solos. The fact that children appear on stage but sing diegetic music rather than book songs indicates the child’s status as an object to be observed and enjoyed—a flat character rather than a protagonist with agency and a character-development arc.

Some rock musicals from the late sixties and seventies were comprised of ensembles of child performers. The Me Nobody Knows (1970) staged actual student writings from New York City reform schools and the inner city, and Runaways (1978) used urban teenagers’ stories of trauma for the dramatic segments of a musical revue. However, such modular works do not have a standard plot with a narrative arc and character development. In other words, they feature children but do not have a child protagonist. As Donelle Ruwe discusses in her essay, The Me Nobody Knows complicates the typical top-down approach to children’s musicals in which adults are
active creators and children are passive recipients. These shows feature the actual words and real experiences of children.

Oliver! (London 1960; Broadway 1963) marks the beginning of musicals featuring a child protagonist. Oliver sings several book songs. As Marc Napolitano discusses in his essay, the character of Oliver Twist as written by Dickens is passive in that he “neither speaks up for himself nor drives the plot.” As the protagonist of the musical adaptation, Oliver is more assertive and in control of his destiny, and, as Napolitano suggests, his plaintive ballad “Where is Love” is the emotional crux of the show. Even with Oliver’s central position in the musical, he does not experience dynamic character growth; he starts sweetly innocent and remains innocent. His essential goodness is never challenged.

No musical prior to 1977 relies on a child protagonist (and thus on the actor who plays her) to the degree that Annie does. As James Leve discusses in his essay, Annie is also the first musical theater child protagonist who belts. Unlike songs for a boy soprano such as Oliver or the trained voice of a female soprano, Annie’s songs are hypertheatrical and diva-performative. This aggressive type of singing, popularized by Ethel Merman, is now ubiquitous on Broadway and in children’s culture more generally. Musicals with child protagonists are becoming more frequent, such as Caroline, or Change, Billy Elliot, Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, and Matilda, but the child protagonist is still a projection of adult fantasies and needs.

An essential, though rarely discussed, element in the history of children’s musical theater is the rise of theater licensing companies. The leasing of Broadway musicals for amateur performance began in the 1920s, and American (i.e., native-made) musical theater scripts and scores began to be published. The founding of Tams-Witmark Music Library in 1925 reflects the emergence of an amateur market and the profit potential of this market. Today, the Tams-Witmark catalog numbers around 120 musicals, including some of the most popular works in the repertory, such as The Wizard of Oz, Bye Bye Birdie, and Hello, Dolly!

In 1944, Rodgers and Hammerstein founded their own leasing company, R&H Theatricals. The Broadway composer Frank Loesser and the orchestrator Don Walker formed MTI (Musical Theatre International) in the early fifties. The latest addition to licensing companies is Andrew Lloyd Webber’s Really Useful Group, which is now part of the conglomerate Concord Theatricals. Disney Theatrical Leasing controls all of the Disney properties, and it has partnered with MTI to lease production rights for its shows.

MTI has led the way in creating performance editions of musicals for children of varying ages. MTI (which leases Disney’s musicals) offers three categories of musicals for young performers: the Broadway KIDS series (30-minute versions of famous shows such as The Lion King for very young children); the Broadway JR. collection (60-minute versions for upper grade, elementary-school and middle-school children); and School Editions (abridgements running about two hours). MTI leases these shows along
with a package that includes study guides, a director’s guide, recordings and choreography videos. As one of MTI’s ads states, “producing a Disney musical has never been easier or more fun or as deeply rewarding.” Tams-Witmark and other companies have adopted MTI’s business model to create children’s performance editions of Broadway musicals. This practice transforms musicals into versions that might be called, if not “children’s musicals,” at least children’s versions of musicals. If a company such as MTI can create kid’s versions of adult musicals—even a work involving cannibalism and rape such as Sweeney Todd—then content does not seem to matter. Watering down adult musicals does not make them children’s musicals, but it does make them accessible to children as performers.

Recently, MTI has developed new and original works for community and school licensing. These works, such as The Musical Adventures of Flat Stanley JR. and a series of musicals based on the Magic Treehouse books, adapt popular children’s books or teacher favorites and thus have name recognition and a built-in market. MTI not only leases “Broadway KIDS” and “Broadway JR.” versions, but it also sponsors a major musical theater convention for kids and their teachers and show directors. As Stacy Wolf explores in her essay in this collection, this annual event promotes MTI’s shows while offering training workshops for directors, competitions for student performers, and opportunities to perform in the choreography videos that are included in the MTI leasing packages. MTI is a slick operation.

The leasing of production rights for musicals is competitive and profitable. While MTI and others see tremendous opportunities in commissioning
new musicals for amateur performance and in packaging Broadway and Off-Broadway musicals for amateur venues, other leasing companies such as Dramatists Play Service, Dramatic Publishing, and Samuel French have a long tradition of leasing non-commercial plays and musicals for amateur use. Most of these works have yet to be studied and are largely unknown. They cover historical, religious, seasonal, and issue-oriented topics and include many adaptations of classic works. Children’s novels in the public domain, such as *The Secret Garden* and *Wind in the Willows*, appear in various versions in multiple catalogs. Drama Source, another company specializing in non-commercial theater, introduces itself as follows:

We at Drama Source desire to provide inspirational, family-friendly play[s], musicals, and scripts at a price affordable for a full production. We offer some scripts royalty free when a script is ordered for each performer. We also offer some of the lowest prices in the industry both for scripts, royalties, and other supporting material.31

Dramatic Publishing leases both commercial and non-commercial titles. Some of its musicals are intended for adults to perform for children, whereas some are clearly more appropriate for child performers. Dramatic Publishing has many works along the lines of *The Amazing Adventures of Peter Rabbit* and *Einstein Is a Dummy*. Dramatists Play Service offers a few commercial titles, albeit relatively obscure ones, but the lion’s share of its catalog falls under the amateur heading.

These companies specializing in non-commercial offerings have followed the MTI model and have commissioned and adapted musicals for child performers of different ages. Miracle of 2 Productions identifies musicals for “Young Audiences” and “School Editions.” It also leases one-act musicals such as *Pinkalicious* and *Stinky Kids*. Samuel French represents several Broadway musicals, and it too mimics the MTI “JR” approach by offering abridged versions for children. For example, it offers a high school version of *Grease* and *Heathers, the Musical* and a 70-minute “Spring Version” of Marsha Norman’s and Lucy Simon’s *The Secret Garden*. Few major Broadway writers have contributed to the catalogs of these companies, with Charles Strouse, the composer of *Bye Bye Birdie* and *Annie*, being a major exception. Strouse wrote the music and lyrics for a middle-school adaptation of *Charlotte’s Web* and the music for an elementary-school musical, *The Truth about Cinderella*, for Dramatic Publishing.

These companies, despite being a rich source of children’s theatrical works, do not necessarily specialize in “children’s musicals” but rather in amateur theater. In a sense, they focus on B-tier musicals and amateur or semi-professional works. They serve the important function of making relatively unknown works or the works of relatively unknown writers available for performance. They cannot compete with MTI, R&H, Tams-Witmark, and Samuel French, especially since R&H, Tams-Witmark, and Samuel
French have been bought out by the Concord Music conglomerate, which reaches all sectors of the market.

We have suggested that access to the performing repertory of children’s musicals is provided by two different types of leasing companies. The first includes companies such as MTI that have thick catalogs of canonical commercial titles. The other includes companies such as Pioneer Drama Service that specialize in amateur theatrical offerings. The academic literature has not distinguished between these categories, but we propose that by their very distinct commercial models, artistic features, and performance histories, these two types of repertories constitute the traditional fault line between what we might call “children’s musicals” and commercial musicals for mixed-age audiences, or what we term the “family” musical. There is, of course, some overlap between these categories, especially since so many leasing companies are creating child performance versions of commercial Broadway works.

The business of amateur musical theater has become very profitable, and countless young people around the world are engaged in it. Schools and community theaters use musical theater as a teaching tool. Teachers and directors select canonical, commercial, or highly familiar works, often at the whim of the director or the committee behind “artistic” decisions. There is little evidence that titles are chosen for their educational value, though lip service might be paid to an educational purpose. More often, what is taken into consideration is what will sell, as even amateur theaters hope to break even. Self-censorship also affects these decisions, and there have been high-profile cases of protests over amateur productions of musicals that might once have been considered sacrosanct.

**Professional child actors in musical theater**

Children appeared in a wide range of amateur and professional theater productions centuries before the rise of Broadway. School dramas were an essential element of boys’ educations in the 1500s and earlier. In the Enlightenment era, educational theater for children gained new impetus through the emphasis on environmental approaches to child education. French and British authors in particular promoted a “theatre of education” and argued that active forms of learning (such as performing in school and home plays) were a “dynamic pedagogical tool for the socialization of the young.” The late nineteenth century offered celebrated child roles, none more popular than little Eva in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and Cedric in *Little Lord Fauntleroy*. Children also played adult characters, and some adult performers built entire careers playing child characters. A popular novelty was all-children Gilbert and Sullivan troupes. The popularity of child actors in the late nineteenth century reached so high a level that in 1893 the Association for the Protection of Stage Children was established.
During the Depression, age 14 became the dividing line between children who could work and those who could not. However, a 1938 law permitted children younger than 14 to appear in live theater and film. As child film stars rose in popularity during the twenties and thirties, the issue of income earned from their work became complicated. In some cases, wealthy child film stars declared their parents as dependents on their tax forms. The passage in 1939 of the “Coogan Act” recognized that children and their incomes had to be protected, which, Viviana Zelizer argues, affirmed “the new cultural and economic contract between parent and child.”

The issue of child wellbeing in the entertainment industry was pretty much ignored for much of the twentieth century. It was not until 1995 that “The First National Conference on Young Performers” took place. Sponsored by the Screen Actors Guild, it dealt primarily with actors in films. James R. Kincaid, who attended the conference and reported on it in Erotic Innocence, suggested that the conference was the equivalent of forming a committee to look into abuse as opposed to prosecuting abuse. Despite acknowledging that what many children had experienced was tantamount to abuse, the president of SAG insisted that “the Entertainment Industry is practically unique in its need for the use of minors.” Children were victims of a system that relied on exploitation. SAG could have taken a lesson from Daisy Eagan, the star of the 1991 Broadway hit The Secret Garden and the youngest girl actor ever to win a Tony Award. After The Secret Garden, Eagan suffered a breakdown and left the profession for years. One cannot escape the fact that the child on stage is objectified by the audience’s gaze and potentially eroticized. Kincaid argues that the sacrilization of the child is not an antidote to eroticism but a trigger for it (24–25). The more that adults sacrilize children, the more they desire them and, in extreme cases, molest them. Kincaid claims that the notion that all children are adorable is part of an American myth:

Our culture demands that the official child be that way; it is mashed into our heritage, literary and otherwise. This idea has been epitomized in musical theater. I continue to ask why an adult would prefer to pay nearly $200 to hear a child sing when she or he can hear a more developed adult singer perform. The innovative aspect of Matilda might be the fact that she does not sing about being cute. Annie effectively does. She is presented as puppy-dog cute. (112)

As Kincaid acknowledges, children are irresistibly cute, and their adorability holds the imagination and interest of adults, which he describes as “culture’s swoon before the adorable child” (113).

The increased presence and importance of children in professional musicals have meant more demanding emotional, physical, and vocal challenges for professional child actors. In recent years, roles for children have grown in size and number, so much so that during the 2012–13 season, no fewer
than nine Broadway musicals and plays featured child actors according to a 
*New York Times* article “Broadway Babies.” Children are so ubiquitous on Broadway that they support an entire industry of child wranglers who supervise young actors backstage. As Robert Wilson, a child wrangler who has worked on Broadway shows such as *Big* (1996) and *Billy Elliot the Musical* (2005), explains: “My job is first, to care for a child working on a show and look out for his or her general well-being. Second, to fill in the gaps between whatever level of responsibility a child has achieved, and what they need in order to work professionally in the theatre.” The wrangler’s tasks include everything from making sure that young children have a safe work environment, to making sure that a child does not miss stage cues, to stopping children from sucking a grape lollipop right before going on stage.

As children find greater relevance in musical theater to their own lives, scholars see the intrinsic value in examining the intersection of musical theater and children. The diversity of approaches used by our contributors—musicology, ethnomusicology, theater studies, and literary analysis—reveals the intrinsically interdisciplinary nature of children’s studies and musical theater. Our collection barely scratches the surface. Musical theater will continue to play an important role in how children negotiate identity and achieve self-realization. Our contributors examine how musical theater performance affects the emotional and social development of children, how musicals construct ideologies of childhood, how musical theater aesthetics requires a new analytical language that incorporates textuality and performativity, how musicals reflect as well as shape the changing dynamics of family in America, and how the fault line between amateur and professional musical theater uncovers a myriad of issues about children’s participation in musical theater. All of these topics are important, and a better understanding of them can only be achieved through the application of multiple disciplinary approaches. If this collection has achieved only that, then it has achieved its most important goal.

Notes

3 Although there is little extended scholarship on children’s musical theater history, children’s theater history has been discussed. Peter Hollindale’s “Drama” introduces key concepts of the theater for education movement in *International Encyclopedia of Children’s Literature*, ed. Peter Hunt (London: Routledge, 1996), 207–19. For more recent discussions of children and theater, see “Children and Theater,” a special issue of *The Lion and the Unicorn* (36, no. 2, April 2012) edited by Marah Gubar.
4 For example, see Rekha S. Rajan’s *From Backpacks to Broadway: Children’s Experiences in Musical Theatre* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017) and *Musical Theater in Schools: Purpose, Process, Performance* (New York:
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Oxford University Press, 2019). Rajan accepts without question that musical theater provides good educational experiences for children.


11 The Christmas Bus and Bullies in the Hall are children’s musicals leased by Dramatic Publishing.

12 www.pioneerdrama.com/Musical-Child.asp.


16 James Bohn, Music in Disney’s Animated Features: Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs to The Jungle Book (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 2017), 4.


20 See Caroline Hunt’s definition in “Young Adult Literature Evades the Theorists,” Children’s Literature Association Quarterly 21, no. 1, (1996): 4–11. Early studies of young adult literature include Robyn McCallum’s Ideologies of Identity in Adolescent Fiction: The Dialogic Construction of Subjectivity (New York: Garland, 1999) and Roberta Seelinger Trites’s Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2000). See also Lee A. Talley’s discussion of the historical use of “young adult” in Paul and Nel, Keywords for Children, 228–32. Recently, the
term “new adult” has appeared. According to Amy Pattee (in “Between Youth and Adulthood: Young Adult and New Adult Literature,” *Children’s Literature Association Quarterly* 42, no. 2 [2017]), “new adult” is a marketing category referring to “emerging” adults; new adult texts feature “the exploits of female protagonists in their late college or early post-college years working to establish themselves in the world of work while navigating a widening romantic landscape” (219).

For an overview of sociological approaches to young adult studies, see “An Introduction to Seven Technologies of Youth Studies” by Susan Talburt and Nancy Lesko in *Keywords in Youth Studies: Tracing Affects, Movements, Knowledges*, ed. Nancy Lesko and Susan Talburt (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2012), 1–10.


Despite its title, *High School Musical* substitutes the musical theater idiom with a music video idiom. Coming on the heels of *Glee*, NBC’s musical drama *Smash* (2012–13) included a young adult character who attempts to break into Broadway. A stage adaptation of *Smash* is in the works.


Stacy Wolf describes the history of MTI and its Broadway, JR. and KIDS catalog in “Not Only on Broadway: Disney JR. and Disney KIDS Across the USA,” in *The Disney Musical on Stage and Screen: Critical Approaches from Snow White to Frozen*, ed. George Rodosthenous (London: Bloomsbury Methuen, 2017), 133–51.

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32 Broadway Musical Home (http://broadwaymusicalhome.com/production-rights.htm) lists all of these companies. The site does not include Disney.

3 Barry Keith Grant, The Hollywood Film Musical (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 36. Baltimore, 39–40, notes that the “child-centeredness” of the musical has been used to denigrate the form and explain its “infantile” appeal to gay men.


8 On integration and realism, successful and not, in Rodgers and Hammerstein, see Millie Taylor, Musical Theatre, Realism and Entertainment (New York: Routledge, 2016), 4–7; and Andrea Most, “‘We Know We Belong to the Land’: The Theatricality of Assimilation in Rodgers and Hammerstein’s Oklahoma!,” PMLA 113, no. 1 (1998): 77–89. On sentimentality in Rodgers and Hammerstein’s musicals, see Todd S. Purdum, Something Wonderful: Rodgers and Hammerstein’s Broadway Revolution (New York: Henry Holt, 2018), 15.


12 On the afterlives of The Sound of Music’s songs, including their association with the holidays, see Flinn, 99–105.


14 Quoted in Purdum, 15.


21 As Stacy Wolf notes in her lesbian feminist reading of *The Sound of Music*, Maria’s tomboy personality and initial reluctance to leave the homosocial cloister of the abbey are signs of a reluctance to grow into heterosexuality, but we may also find here a reluctance to grow up at all.
24 Incidentally, the city of Salzburg has itself contributed much to the mystification of both music and childhood as the birthplace of Western music’s most famous prodigy, Mozart, who has been regarded as a natural musical genius but was subjected to extreme musical discipline. See Maynard Solomon, *Mozart: A Life* (New York: Harper Collins: 1995), 3–96.
25 Musical instruction books entitled *Gradus ad Parnassum* (Steps to Parnassus) include one on counterpoint by Johann Fux and collections of piano etudes by Muzio Clementi and by Carl Czerny. Claude Debussy’s *The Children’s Corner* parodies these works in a piece entitled “Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum.” The English word *scale* comes from Latin, *la scala*, meaning *ladder* or *to climb*.
26 In the movie, “My Favorite Things” is sung during the thunderstorm, and “Goatherd” appears during the puppet show, in which it is the musical foreshadowing of the romance that already blossoms between Maria and the Captain.
27 Altman, 47–48, 52, 81. Their union constitutes a prominent example of the marriage trope in musicals, discussed by Knapp, 9.
29 Knapp, 239.
30 On Maria as American, see Altman, 341; Knapp, 236–38; and Wolf, *A Problem Like Maria*, 223–24.
33 Quoted in Laurence Maslon, *The Sound of Music Companion* (New York: Fireside, 2007), 148. Kael was fired from *McCall’s* after outcry from fans of the musical who were offended by her review.
35 Flinn, 81. For more on the ability of the child’s vocal qualities to construct and negotiate categorical representations of the child, see James Leve, “Little Girls, Big Voices: *Annie*,” in this volume.
36 Stockton, 11–17.
38 Knapp, 233, describes the song as an inspirational hymn in the musical language of Broadway.
39 See Knapp, 235, on the parallels between Rolf and the Captain, who both have the opportunity to be rescued from their stern outlooks by innocent women, with the Captain saved and Rolf lost.
40 See Flinn, 92–93, on how The Sound of Music becomes “seriously unfun” after the wedding, and Sam Baltimore on the refusal of sing-along audiences to allow this fact to prevent their audience participation in “Camping Out: Queer Communities and Public Sing-Alongs,” in Music and Camp, ed. Christopher Moore and Philip Purvis (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2018), 130.
42 Flinn, 13.
44 Altman, 58.
45 See Altman, 57–58, on Kelly as a childlike figure and the American musical’s reliance on child and childlike stars to glorify youth and “testify to our desire to retain the qualities of childhood past the age of maturity.”
48 McLeer, 98.
49 Sammond, 15.
50 Sammond, 20.
52 Giroux, 148.
54 Sammond, 313.
55 Giroux, The Mouse, 18.


15 Giroux, The Mouse, 85.


19 Flanagan.

20 For critical analyses of the Mary Poppins stories, see Giorgia Grilli, Myth, Symbol, and Meaning in Mary Poppins: The Governess as Provocateur (New York: Routledge, 2007; first published in Italian as In volo, dietro la porta in 2007) and Julia Kunz, Intertextuality and Psychology in P. L. Travers’s Mary Poppins Books (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2014).

21 The 20-year story of Disney’s difficulty in securing Travers’s permission to adapt her stories and the subsequent challenges that occurred during the film’s development became the basis for the film Saving Mr. Banks (Disney, 2013), in which Tom Hanks played the effusive Disney opposite Emma Thompson as the reticent Pamela Travers. The events are chronicled in Valerie Lawson’s Mary Poppins, She Wrote: The Life of P. L. Travers (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999), especially chapter 13, “The Americanization of Mary.”


23 Sherman and Sherman, 39.

24 Travers’s involvement is documented on taped recordings made in 1961 at the Disney Studios.

25 Benjamin Spock, The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care, new edition (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1957), 345. The Common Sense Book was first published in 1946. Since the 1957 edition was the most recent edition at the time Mary Poppins appeared, this edition will be cited in the present essay.


27 Spock, Common Sense Book, 577.

28 Flanagan.

29 The Sherman brothers wanted to create a souvenir for the Banks to take home from their “Jolly Holiday” in the chalk painting and decided it should be a word—supercalifragilisticexpialidocious—along with a distinctive and easily remembered song. They created the title word to rhyme with atrocious and precocious, both of which were descriptors for the children’s typical pre-Poppins behavior. When supercalifragilisticexpialidocious entered the 1966 Random House dictionary, its definition was “a nonsense word which is a superlative,” writes Cary Wong in “Practically Perfect in Every Way: Richard Sherman Talks about the Sherman Brothers’ Extraordinary Career Writing Hit Songs for Stage & Screen,” Film Score Monthly 8, no. 6 (2003): 21. Richard Sherman was elated and called it “a superlative superlative” (21). “Feed the Birds” instructs
us that kindness does not cost much. The song was written especially for the character actress Jane Darwell, who played the Bird Woman in the film. Darwell and Disney both wept when they first saw the sequence on screen (Sherman and Sherman, 49).

30 The brothers remembered their own father making kites for them and family trips to the park to fly them. These fond memories became the inspiration for the jubilant song (Sherman and Sherman, 46).

31 Sherman and Sherman, 51.

32 The family name in Fleming’s book is Pott; it becomes Potts in the film and subsequent stage musical.

33 The first syllable of Caractacus’s name is “car,” a possible reference to his supreme creation that not only bonds him to his family but also helps him defeat, in the film and stage versions, the Vulgarians. The historical Caractacus was a first-century British chieftain who led the native resistance to the Roman conquest.

34 Sherman and Sherman, 150.


36 Sherman and Sherman, 150.


38 For a critical discussion of Roald Dahl and children’s fiction, see Mark I. West, Roald Dahl (New York: Twayne, 1992).

39 Sammond, 257.

40 Roald Dahl offers another example of anti-industrialism in the factory in Charlie and the Chocolate Factory (1962), in which magic is a vital part of the assembly-line process.

41 See Sammond, 252ff. for more on this topic.

42 Sammond, 381.


44 Spock, Problems of Parents, 68.

45 Martin Gottfried, Balancing Act: The Authorized Biography of Angela Lansbury (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1999), 197.

46 Sherman and Sherman, 162.


48 McLeer, 83.

49 Spock, Problems of Parents, 231.

50 Spock, Common Sense Book, 576.


52 Spock, Common Sense Book, 419.

53 Sherman and Sherman, 167

54 The song appears on page 164 of Robert B. and Richard M. Sherman’s, “Walt’s Time: From Before to Beyond, and Angela Lansbury’s demo recording of the second verse is included on Bedknobs and Broomsticks,” Walt Disney Records 60784-7 CD (2002).


This expression is an African proverb that exists in several versions across the continent and is the title of Hillary Rodham Clinton’s It Takes a Village: And Other Lessons Children Teach Us (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).


The original London production lasted just over three years, closing on January 12, 2008. The musical’s Broadway premiere took place at the New Amsterdam Theatre, where The Lion King began its substantial run, on November 16, 2006. Mary Poppins’s 2,619-performance run came to an end on March 3, 2013. To recreate the iconic roles, the producers opted for a “gifted if essentially unknown cast” (Matt Wolf, “It’s ‘Poppins’ Fresh,” Variety, December 20, 2004: 46.). The English actress Laura Michelle Kelly originated the title role in London and received an Olivier Award for her performance. Ashley Brown, whose credits prior to Mary Poppins included Belle in Beauty and the Beast, another Disney production, led the New York troupe. To play Bert, the versatile and athletic Gavin Lee was cast in both London and New York.


Fellows at the time was perhaps best known for writing the script to the British mystery film Gosford Park (2001); he is perhaps best known nowadays for creating the popular television series Downton Abbey (2010–15).


Nodelman, 4.

Gioux, The Mouse, 2–3.

1 At the point of this final negotiation, there were four in the series: Mary Poppins (1934), Mary Poppins Comes Back (1935), Mary Poppins Opens the Door (1943), and Mary Poppins in the Park (1952); the first, and parts of the second, were the main basis for the Disney adaptation.

2 Quotations from Saving Mr. Banks, directed by John Lee Hancock (DVD release, Walt Disney Studios Home Entertainment, 2014).
I discuss *Meet Me in St. Louis* in *The American Musical and the Performance of Personal Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 94–102; and “Getting off the Trolley: Musicals contra Cinematic Reality,” in *From Stage to Screen. Musical Films in Europe and United States (1927–1961)*, ed. Massimiliano Sala. Volume 18 of *Speculum Musicae* (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2012), 162–64 and passim. Both “You and I” and “Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas” are understood to be as familiar to those in the film as the title song (which, however, had not been written at the time the film takes place), but in both cases were written for the film, the former by Nacio Herb Brown and Arthur Freed, and the latter by Hugh Martin and Ralph Blane.

Regarding the father’s trajectory in *Mary Poppins*, see my *Personal Identity*, 141–50. All songs in the film are by Richard and Robert Sherman.


Regarding *The Sound of Music*, see my “History, The Sound of Music, and Us,” *American Music* 22 (2004): 133–44; and *National Identity*, 230–39; in both, I discuss “The Sound of Music” and “Edelweiss” in terms of their nationalist sentiment, as expressed through words, music, and situation. All songs in the show are by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II.

These adaptations of *Annie* for the screen are considerably different from each other, and also—more than any of the other adaptations listed here—from the Broadway show. The 1982 film, directed by John Huston, was a drastic reconsideration, and in the end a curious mix of quite good things and equally unfortunate things. The 1999 television production, directed by Rob Marshall for Disney, is the truest to the Broadway original (e.g., restoring “N.Y.C.,” which was dropped for the 1982 version), but significantly shortened to increase its appeal to children. The 2014 version, directed by Will Gluck and including new songs by Sia Furler and Greg Kurstin (who also rearranged the retained numbers from Charles Strouse and Martin Charnin’s original score) is “updated” in many other ways, as well, often successfully, but sometimes not; in any case, the fatherly redemption plot is brought significantly to the fore, although it is overshadowed somewhat by the new racial dynamic, itself perhaps inspired by the “color-blind” casting of Audra McDonald as Grace for the Disney version.

Sally Benson wrote the 1941–42 *New Yorker* vignettes that the film is based on (“5135 Kensington,” published as *Meet Me in St. Louis* together with additional material while the film was already in preparation [New York: Random House, 1942]). Benson was six at the time the family moved to New York, and was nicknamed “Tootie” as a child; while the basic perspective thus shifts to an older daughter for the film, that shift is complicated by other redistributions of roles and behaviors as the original vignettes were adapted for the film.


For more on how these films relate to each other, as loosely connected members of a series, see Samuel Dworkin Baltimore’s “‘Do It Again’: Comic Repetition, Participatory Reception and Gendered Identity on Musical Comedy’s Margins” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2013), 61–62. In what might have been a further carryover, Julie Andrews was rumored to have been offered the role of Truly Scrumptious in *Chitty*, which in the event was played by Sally Ann Howes, who had earlier replaced Andrews when she left *My Fair Lady*.

(as, perhaps, a cross-breed between Mary Poppins and the studio’s popular The Absent-Minded Professor [1961] and its sequel, The Son of Flubber [1963]), Chitty is the only one of the three films discussed in this section not produced by the studio, and the first non-Disney film-musical for which the Sherman Brothers wrote the songs. Ironically, Disney released its own magic-car film in the same year as Chitty. Disney’s The Love Bug, based on “Car, Boy, Girl” by Gordon Buford, with David Tomlinson (Mr. Banks in Mary Poppins) playing the villainous Peter Thorndyke, was wildly successful and spawned several sequels and other spin-offs, whereas Chitty (a much more expensive film to begin with) lost money in its first release.

12 Although idioms are hard to date with precision, the expression “chitty-bang-bang” seems to have originated as a winking reference during World War I to the well-worn path from British officers getting leave tickets to Paris (chitty) to their visiting brothels there (bang-bang). Beginning in 1921, Count Louis Zborowski used the name “Chitty Bang Bang” for a series or racing cars he built and raced, ostensibly because of the sounds their engines made (as Fleming notes at the beginning of the book). Given the slightly earlier provenance of the phrase and the dispositions of Zborowski and Fleming, we may well assume that both of them knew and relished its cheeky double meaning.

13 This is another change from the book, where Jeremy has black hair, the first salvo in a series of gendered behavioral differentials between the twins that, while consistent with Fleming’s other work, seems already somewhat dated by 1964, and is largely absent from the film. Notably, Bedknobs and Broomsticks indulges precisely the kind of gendered play Chitty omits, when—in a scene invented for the film—the children encounter a nursery in an abandoned mansion, where Carrie goes from dollhouse to dolls, young Paul rides a rocking horse, and his older brother Charlie, after exploring the room thoroughly, settles in with a train set.

14 A somewhat different kind of doubleness than that between children and adults occurs in this song, where the Sherman Brothers insert a musical joke for those inclined to relish such things. Thus, the dip in register the first time she sings the phrase “wound by a key” becomes an actual key change when the phrase recurs, in timely preparation for the minor-mode excursion of the song’s “B” section. (See below regarding how Fun Home extends this kind of punning musical play.)

15 One must imagine that “The Beautiful Briny” would have occupied the place in Mary Poppins eventually filled by the horse race that Mary wins while riding a merry-go-round horse, and that it was discarded because of its suggestion of a possible romance between Bert and Mary, a possibility already broached and deftly countered in “Jolly Holiday,” as noted.

16 Mary Norton’s two books about the novice witch Eglantine Price, originally published in 1943 (The Magic Bed-Knob; or, How to Become a Witch in Ten Easy Lessons) and 1945 (Bonfires and Broomsticks), were in 1957 published together as Bed-Knob and Broomsticks, with the title for the first shortened to “The Magic Bed-Knob”). In a further difference between books and film, in Norton’s The Magic Bed-Knob, when Eglantine and the children visit a South Sea island, it is inhabited not by fanciful talking cartoon-animals, but by very real cannibals, from whom they just manage to escape after she wins a magic duel against the resident witch doctor.

17 The songs of Into the Woods are by Stephen Sondheim; those of The Secret Garden are by Lucy Simon and Marsha Norman.

18 Two sequels confirm this inference, although neither made it to Broadway; both Annie 2: Miss Hannigan’s Revenge (1989) and the much more successful Annie Warbucks (1992–93) hinge on the plot device that Warbucks must marry if he is to be allowed to keep Annie.
For more on the creepy cross-generational “romance” between Annie and Daddy Warbucks in *Annie*, see Zelda Knapp, “We Need to Talk about *Annie*,” http://aworkunfinishing.blogspot.com/2013/05/we-need-to-talk-about-annie.html, accessed October 10, 2015.

Frances Hodgson Burnett’s *The Secret Garden* rejects this phrase overtly, rejoining Archibald’s expressed fear that he may be “quite too late” with a narrative comment: “Of course this was the wrong Magic—to begin by saying ‘too late.’ Even Colin could have told him that,” *The Secret Garden*, ed. Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina (New York: Norton, 2006), 168.


Indeed, *A Little Night Music*, which is plotted as a sex comedy, also plays through the trope of fatherly redemption regarding Frederik and Desiree’s daughter Fredrika, even if that subplot is oddly eclipsed by Frederik’s son running away with his young step-mother.

Regarding the generational and gendered dimensions of Mary’s role in saving Colin and his father, see Maureen M. Martin’s “Healing National Manhood in *The Secret Garden*,” in *Frances Hodgson Burnett’s The Secret Garden: A Children’s Classic at 100*, ed. Jackie C. Horne and Joe Sutliff Sanders (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2011), 137–53. Martin takes the Craven estate to be a synecdoche for the nation, relating the household’s situation, allegorically, to a complex of issues relating to empire and an emergent crisis of English national identity at the turn of the last century.

*Wicked*’s songs are by Stephen Schwartz; *Enchanted*’s by Alan Menken and Stephen Schwartz; *Matilda*’s by Tim Minchin; and *Fun Home*’s by Jeanine Tesori and Lisa Kron.

The experiences of queer children have been addressed with increasing frequency through both memoirs and studies. For a useful typology, see Kathryn Bond Stockton’s *The Queer Child; or, Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009). Regarding their place in children’s literature, see *Over the Rainbow: Queer Children’s and Young Adult Literature*, ed. Michelle Ann Abate and Kenneth Kidd (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2011).


I am grateful to Zelda Knapp for pointing this out to me. As she describes this scene, “Adult Alison is sitting in the chair, half attending to the scene, half in her thoughts, and then her father addresses her, and—Beth Malone is just wonderful in this moment—she both draws in to herself and finally becomes present to those around her. She’s not used to being seen by her memories” (personal communication).

The preponderance of evidence suggests that her father’s death was a suicide, although there are counter-indications, which Alison notes.

As Arreanna Rostosky puts it, “The father’s music in *Fun Home* is more discordant than the material sung by any other character. ‘Edges of the World,’ toward the end of the show—essentially a mad song—is really our only opportunity to hear from him musically, and it doesn’t paint a flattering portrait”
While his unflattering musical presence carries considerable pathos, appropriate to someone who has long been uncomfortable in his own skin—in this case someone whose sexual life has been twisted by the confines of a closet he is in the process of being forced out of—the fact remains that he has no song to win an audience over, certainly nothing to balance the books against Alison’s “Come to the Fun Home” (with her brothers), “Ring of Keys,” and “Changing My Major.”


5 In her scrutiny of Dickens’s concept of narratorial omniscience, Audrey Jaffe notes that “characters are constructed as psychological entities, with identifiable patterns of speech and behavior, and as physical entities, distinguished by bodily features and details of clothing . . . The omniscient narrator’s knowledge thus importantly depends on his immateriality or invisibility: the narrator remains indeterminate, exempt from the constructedness of character.” Audrey Jaffe, Vanishing Points: Dickens, Narrative, and the Subject of Omniscience (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991), 13.

6 James R. Kincaid writes that “It is impossible to define the characteristics or moral positions of the narrator in this novel, for they are continually shifting.” James R. Kincaid, Dickens and the Rhetoric of Laughter (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 54.

7 While serializing the novel in Bentley’s Miscellany, Dickens became embroiled in a bitter feud with his publisher, Richard Bentley: coming off the success of The Pickwick Papers, Dickens pressured Bentley into allowing Oliver Twist to fulfill two separate contractual obligations. Scholars continue to debate whether Dickens conceptualized Oliver Twist as a full-length novel, or whether he improvised during the chaotic publication period. Notably, the original serial establishes Oliver’s hometown as Mudfog, the fictional setting of a series of satirical sketches that Dickens published in Bentley’s Miscellany prior to (and during) Oliver Twist’s serialization. Paul Schlicke, ed., The Oxford Companion to Charles Dickens (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 437–38.


9 Lesnik-Oberstein, 87.


12 Lesnik-Oberstein, 92.

13 Thornton, 130.

14 Pip, David, and Esther—Dickens’s three major first-person narrators—display a remarkable capacity for embracing the viewpoint of the child, but they can only attain discursive power as adults. Furthermore, Pip’s overwhelming guilt
frequently prompts him to misinterpret his own story; David’s conflicted endorsement of self-discipline implies that he does not wholeheartedly believe in the moral that he is putting forth; and Esther’s demureness is frequently interpreted by readers as coyness. In addition to wrestling with their psychological traumas, the adult-narrators invariably wrestle with language in a way that the child protagonists do not.

15 Lesnik-Oberstein, 98.

16 Hochman and Wachs, 32.

17 Aleichem’s Tevye far surpasses Dickens’s Oliver in the realm of discursive power, however. Tevye serves as the narrator of his own stories and uses narrative as a means of coping with his general helplessness in the face of events over which he has little or no control; he is thus much more similar to his musical counterpart than book-Oliver is to musical-Oliver. Much as book-Tevye uses discourse and narration, musical-Tevye uses music and song to assert discursive power and to thus appear proactive despite an underlying passivity.


20 Hochman and Wachs astutely note that book-Oliver’s almost incessant bouts of physical sickness are framed positively because these moments of complete helplessness and vulnerability prompt caring characters such as Mr. Brownlow, Mr. Bedwin, the Maylies, and Dr. Losberne to take pity on him. For the first half of the novel, Oliver tends to be happiest when he is deathly ill, for it is in these moments that he is most lovingly cared for by other people, another indication of the character’s remarkable passivity (39).

21 Scott McMillin, *The Musical as Drama* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 151. Perhaps the ultimate example of the conflict between an omniscient character-narrator and the conventions of the musical is the narrator in Stephen Sondheim’s *Into the Woods*: “*Into the Woods* has an author figure standing to the side of the stage . . . Sondheim has a joke up his sleeve, though. The Narrator is a deeply unwanted person in his omniscient complacency” (McMillin, 152).


24 Hochman and Wachs, 55.


27 Andrews points out, David, the narrator “trusts and admires an open heart, a childlike simplicity and immediacy of emotional response, as a guarantee of moral integrity. But at the same time, his rites of passage out of childhood persuade him of the dangers of an ‘undisciplined heart.’ This dilemma lies at the core of the novel” (148).

28 Kincaid, 164. See also Hochman and Wachs, 61.

29 Kincaid, 163.


31 Andrews, 150.

Several musicals utilize this convention of the child character transitioning to adulthood during a musical number. Notable examples include “Baby June and her Newsboys” in Gypsy, the “Opening Act Two” in Mame, “The Graveyard” in Jane Eyre, and “I Know It’s Today” in Shrek The Musical. This trend highlights the almost cinematic capacity of musical numbers to create a chronological “jump cut” in the narrative while preserving a sense of coherence and continuity.

Dickens, David Copperfield, chapter 48.

Andrews, 145.


5 Bethany Rogers, “‘Better’ People, Better Teaching: the Vision of the National Teacher Corps, 1965–1968,” History of Education Quarterly 49, no. 3 (August 2009), 349. The National Teacher Corps was “fundamentally anti-teacher education programs,” and it saw teaching as a feminized field (348–49). The Corps used its selection process to “correct” for age, sex (giving male applicants preferential treatment), and education. In 1966, the first year of the program, a majority of the applicants were female, but the Corps accepted more men than women so that the Corps struck a 50–50 gender balance. The ratio two years later was closer to 57% male (361).


8 In an 1896 address to the NEA, Jane Addams argued that “education must begin with the child’s own experiences,” quoted in Arthur N. Applebee, Tradition and Reform in the Teaching of English (Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1974), 47. The goal of teaching expressive and experiential-based writing was codified in the 1917 NEA/NCTE manifesto Reorganization of English in Secondary Schools.


10 For the transition to urban children’s poetry, see Morag Styles, From the Garden to the Street: Three Hundred Years of Poetry for Children (London: Cassell, 1998).


In my August 18, 2017 phone interview with Cleveland, he describes selecting a name: “In 1965 I was sitting around on the steps of our building [Boys High School] with a junior, senior, and another senior, sitting and talking. One of the guys was going to go into the military, and he saw it as his only way out though he might get killed. We talked all night, and by the time morning came, he decided to join the Black Panther movement instead. And that’s when I chose the name ‘Clorox.’ I later changed it to ‘Klorox’ to make it my name and not the product. I used it through my college years, and the reference to bleach was a protest name.”

Franklin Cleveland (Clorox), in Joseph, *The Me Nobody Knows*, 42.

Cleveland is uncertain of the spelling of Gladys Harberger [Harburger?].

Teddy is about a hibernating bear who discovers that his forest has been razed to make room for parking lots and heads off to Wall Street. Friedman phone interview with Ruwe, September 29, 2016. All subsequent quotes from Friedman are from this interview.

See Lauren Acton’s essay in this collection on the vocal range of young children.

I have not determined the age of three of the actors. In addition to Douglas Grant, the youngest actors in the cast were Melanie Henderson (age 13), Irene Cara (11), and Kevin Lindsay (13). The script indicates that the character played by Douglas Grant should be between the ages of 10 and 11. Giancarlo Esposito, one of the understudies, was only 10.

When asked about *Sesame Street*, Friedman stated that it was not a direct inspiration, though he acknowledged that it must have made some impact on *The Me Nobody Knows*, for in hindsight, he could see connections between them.


Michael Davis, *Street Gang: The Complete History of Sesame Street* (New York: Penguin, 2008), 161. The musical director and main composer for *Sesame Street*, Joe Raposo, had little experience with children’s texts other than a stint as the musical director of the Off-Broadway revue *The Mad Show* (1966), loosely based on *Mad Magazine*. 
James Leve, *American Musical Theater* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 342. See chapter 16, “Rock on Broadway” for discussion of the “rock” musical. According to Friedman, the Atlantic Recording Corporation, the producer of the original cast recording, was very conservative. It included only those songs from the show that fit a generic rock sound and left off the more complex, avant-garde works.


Jeff Britton, quoted in Dunn, 42.

Friedman, *The Me Nobody Knows* liner notes. *The Me Nobody Knows* was Friedman's first Broadway show, and he was extremely hands-on. Friedman did not farm out the dance arrangements, orchestration, vocal arrangements, and incidental music. Instead, Friedman did it all. He is, in his own words, “a complete musician” and a “complete composer.” He attributes the unified sound of the show to his involvement with all aspects of the score.


Cleveland eventually started law school and became a drug and alcohol counselor from 1974 to 79. From 1984 until his retirement in 2017, he was a high school history teacher.


This text is by Arthur Jackson, age 15, in Joseph's *The Me Nobody Knows*, 36.

Several of the anthology’s poems respond to the assassination of Martin Luther King. At least one poem, “What Happens to Life” by Donald Morgan, imitates the rhetorical questions in Langston Hughes's “A Dream Deferred.” Morgan asks. “Does it dry / like the melting of snow / in winter” (142).

Choreographer Pat Birch was inspired by Harlem kids dancing to jukeboxes and moves she saw in Harlem basketball courts. She felt she was overlooked for a Tony Award nomination because she used authentic ghetto-styled choreography. See Elin Schoen, “The Broadway Baby—Live from New York,” *New York Magazine*, July 23, 1979: 46.


Prior to appearing in *The Me Nobody Knows*, the white actress Beverly Ann Bremer had appeared in *Hair*, and she returned to *Hair* in a different role after *The Me Nobody Knows* finished its Broadway run. Jose Fernandez made his Broadway debut with *The Me Nobody Knows* and also joined the cast of *Hair*.


Friedman wrote over 60 songs for *Electric Company*, including the extremely popular “Spider-Man Theme Song.”


Taking My Turn won the Outer Critics Circle Award for Best Lyrics/Music and was nominated for a Drama Desk Award. It was presented on the PBS’ Great Performances series with a cast that included Margaret Whiting, Marni Nixon, and Cissy Houston.


“Legit” is shorthand for legitimate, the term applied to the type of singing adopted by singers of art (i.e., “classical”) music.

This essay deals exclusively with children in musicals. The treatment of children in opera deserves a study of its own.


Grant, 28.


Private live recording.

Charnin claims that “Tomorrow [was] a reaction to what was going on in the country—the political situation, the war, the economy, the sense of quiet desperation that everyone had, the disenchantment with government leaders . . . there were no heroes . . . [Annie] is the eternal optimist . . . We all want her to survive. We wanted the country to survive. That’s why the song was written.” This narrative seems more like spin than fact, manufactured to strengthen the musical’s connection to the country’s improved outlook after Watergate and Vietnam.
12 Julie Stevens and Gil Cates, Jr., Life After Tomorrow (Arts Alliance America, 2007), DVD.
14 Personal interview with Badiene Magaziner.
19 Younger performers such as Bernadette Peters and Patti Lupone were still rising stars in the late seventies. Peters was cast to play Lily St. Regis in the 1982 movie version of Annie. Kristen Chenowith, a soprano with a much higher and supple voice than Peters’s, played the same role in the 1999 film version of Annie.
22 Gloria Steinem, “Pornography—Not Sex but the Obscene Use of Power,” Ms. 6, no. 2 (August, 1977), cover and 43–44.
24 Alan Jay Lerner practically built a cottage industry out of such storylines. My Fair Lady, Gigi, On a Clear Day You Can See Forever, and Lolita, My Love center on this trope.
25 In her films, Temple often performs, be it for a group of orphans in Curly Top (1935), the all-male plane passengers in Bright Eyes (1934), or the radio audience in Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm (1938).
26 Milton Glaser’s famous “I Love New York” logo was unveiled on July 15, 1977, less than three months after Annie opened.

29 *Matilda the Musical* employed both real children and adult actors who could pass as children, cutting down on the amount of oversight needed (although the reason given was aesthetic in nature). In the 2015 Broadway revival of *The King and I*, 18-year-old Jon Viktor Corpuz played the part of the King's son, Prince Chulalongkorn, which he had played twice before, the first time when he was 12.

30 *Life After Tomorrow*.


32 Stevens and Cates.

33 www.youtube.com/watch?v=zEp-wtqpwCU. In later years, Pacitti pursued a singing career.


36 “Show People with Paul Wontorek Interview: ‘Annie’ Broadway Icon Andrea McArdle,” www.youtube.com/watch?v=yGgnKw5TKjc. Anna Graceman, the singer McArdle had in mind, was 11 at the time, but she had a remarkably mature and soulful belt.

1 As I was finishing this essay, I contacted Disney dramaturg Ken Cerniglia to find out who routined the *Newsies* overture. He kindly communicated this question to *Newsies*’s music supervisor Michael Kosarin, who volunteered (unprompted!) that his decision to begin the show with solo instruments was inspired by the similarly quiet opening to *Annie*’s overture. Email correspondence between Cerniglia, Kosarin, and the author, January 11, 2018.


3 Other cartoonists took over the strip after Gray’s death.


12 Lindenmeyer, 4.
16 This frame is reproduced in the middle section of Smith’s History of Little Orphan Annie.
17 Gray, “The Square Deal.”
18 Kerr, “Nothing’s Comic.”
20 This and all subsequent quotations from the stage version of Annie are taken from an unpublished Broadway production script, Annie: A Play in Two Acts (January 6, 1978): Thomas Meehan, book; Martin Charnin, lyrics; Charles Strouse, music. This script is available at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.
23 “Be Our Guest” features lyrics by Howard Ashman and music by Alan Menken (who also composed the music for Newsies).
24 Charnin, 5.
26 Lisa Simpson, quoted in Berlant, 49.
27 Gray, Little Orphan Annie, October 3, 1924.
29 Horace Greeley, Recollections of a Busy Life (New York: J. B. Ford, 1868), 47.
31 This and all subsequent quotations from the stage version of Newsies are taken from an unpublished Broadway production script dated March 24, 2012 (Harvey Fierstein, book; Jack Feldman, lyrics; Alan Menken, music). This script is available at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.
32 I am grateful to Marc Napolitano for drawing my attention to this difference between the two endings. Ken Cerniglia and Lisa Mitchell supply more proof that the stage version of Newsies stresses compromise and eschews “naïve idealism” in “The Business of Children in Disney’s Theater,” in Entertaining Children: The Participation of Youth in the Entertainment Industry, ed. Gillian Arrighi and Victor Emeljanow (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 142.
33 Letter to Archbishop Mandell Creighton (April 5, 1887), quoted in Roland Hill, Lord Acton (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 300.
34 For more on this subject, see James Leve’s essay “Little Girls, Big Voices: Annie” in this volume and Jacqueline Warwick’s essay “Urchins and Angels: Little

35 Quoted in Cerniglia, Newsies: Stories, 80.
38 Historian David Nasaw is quoted in “The Strike! The True Story,” bonus material on the “Collector’s Edition” Newsies DVD (Disney, 2002). I am grateful to Alexandra Valint for suggesting that I explore the question of how many newsies were female.
4 The first articulation of the concept of the inner child can be traced back to the early 1960s, with the publication of Hugh Missildine’s Your Inner Child of the Past (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963) and Eric Berne’s Games People Play: The Basic Handbook of Transactional Analysis (New York: Ballantine, 1964). By the 1990s, publications exhorting readers to reclaim, recover, and rescue their inner child were coming thick and fast. See, for example, Penny Parks, Rescuing the “Inner Child”: Therapy for Adults Sexually Abused as Children (London: Souvenir Press, 1990); John Bradshaw, Home Coming: Reclaiming and Championing your Inner Child (New York: Bantam, 1990); and Lucia Capaccione, Recovery of Your Inner Child (London: Simon and Schuster, 1991).


John Bradshaw promotes a range of approaches including writing to your inner child in Home Coming, while Lucia Capacchione’s The Power of Your Other Hand: A Course in Channelling the Inner Wisdom of Your Right Brain (Pompton Plains, NJ: Career, 2001) describes how the inner child can be reached through drawing with one’s non-dominant hand.


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Jacqueline Rose, The Case of Peter Pan: or, the Impossibility of Children’s Fiction (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984), 137.

Falconer, 2.


Dahl gives Miss Honey space to reflect on these qualities toward the end of the book, as she tells Matilda, “You are so much wiser than your years . . . it quite staggers me. Although you look like a child, you are not really a child at all because your mind and your powers of reasoning seem to be fully grown-up. So I suppose we might call you a grown-up child, if you see what I mean.” Roald Dahl, Matilda (London: Penguin, 2007[1988]), 189.

Original cast recordings of the songs from the London and Broadway shows are available. Lyrics can be found in the songbook, Roald Dahl’s Matilda the Musical (London: Wise Publications, 2012). My knowledge of the show is drawn from several viewings, first in Stratford-upon-Avon and then in London between 2011 and 2015. There are numerous videos of the show available on the web. A recording of four of the girls playing Matilda singing “Naughty” at the 2012 Olivier Awards is available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=P9yyiy7aqiE, accessed October 22, 2015.


Lauren Ward, Broadway.com, “Making ‘Matilda.’”

Rob Howell, Broadway.com, “Making ‘Matilda.’”

Dennis Kelly, Broadway.com, “Making ‘Matilda.’”

Matthew Warchus, Broadway.com, “Making ‘Matilda.’”


25 Dennis Kelly, quoted in Cavendish.

26 Tim Minchin, “Making ‘Matilda.’”

27 The video and accompanying comments can be found at www.youtube.com/watch?v=e0tRDhEmdO4&feature=youtu.be. Performed November 19, 2012, broadcast and uploaded to YouTube December 3, 2012, accessed March 23, 2016. On March 23, 2016, it had attracted 3,165,050 views. Comments on crying include: “I saw this today and I started tearing up”; “I’m not usually a weepy person but for some reason this song just hit me real hard in the feels.”; and “It brings me to tears!” On watching others cry: “I watched this show yesterday and my dad next to me started wiping his face and I realized he was crying not to mention a little girl in front of me started to cry once Ms Honeys part came on.” On the emotional impact of the show: “it hits me so hard, my god”; “Absolutely, hits you right in the ‘lost childhood innocence’ gut doesn’t it!”; “This song hits me right in the heart.” On undiminished affective response: “It touches my heart every time”; “gives me chills everytime”; “I cry every time”; “I always cry when Miss Honey sings.” Contributors wondering why they are having an emotional response: “this is amazing but why am I crying”; “I really can’t put my finger on why . . . but this song makes me very emotional”; “Wha—why am I crying???”; “This song (especially in the beginning) is really inexplicable in the greatest way possible.” On innocence: “It’s all about the innocence of not knowing what growing up is and not understanding that the innocence of childhood is one of the best things.” On Miss Honey’s contribution: “When Miss Honey sings, it always breaks my heart, cause she is an adult and she is supposed not to be afraid anymore =/(The truth is so different.” Adult challenges and desire to return to childhood: “the point is that in their world, the only things they think about are eating sweets or watching TV, but when adulthood actually comes around, you no longer find joy in eating so many sweets you feel sick or watching cartoons you used to love as a kid. Instead, you have responsibilities, and never have as much fun as you thought you’d have”; “I don’t want to fight the creatures . . . or haul around the heavy things . . . take me back to my childhood”; “What gets me about this song is some of the things the kids mention: ‘The creatures you have to face beneath the bed’ ‘The questions you need to know the answers to’ ‘The heavy things you have to haul around with you’ They can all be seen as things like . . . jobs (having one and not having one), bills, bullies in the workplace . . . And then I remember thinking as a child ‘I’ll eat all the sweets I’ll want when I’m grown up’ . . . This song makes me want to go back to when I’m a child, and I don’t have to worry about anything important . . .”; and “If only the ‘creatures’ and the ‘heavy things’ were the way I pictured them as a child.”

28 Only Matilda’s mother seems untouched by her powers. The musical’s final scene delivers a partial reconciliation between Matilda and her father, who finally acknowledges her as his daughter, but Mrs. Wormwood appears to be beyond redemption. The politics of gender in the production lie beyond my remit here but call out for further consideration.


30 Dahl, Matilda, 153.

31 Dennis Kelly, Broadway.com, “Making ‘Matilda.’”
32 Dennis Kelly interviewed by Aleks Sierz, “Changing Stories, Changing Things.” Sierz explains, “In Stanley Kubrick’s 1960 film Spartacus there is a climactic scene in which the recaptured rebel slaves are asked to identify Spartacus in exchange for leniency, but each slave says ‘I’m Spartacus,’ and thus shares his fate,” 255.

33 Many thanks to the editors for drawing my attention to this contrast in musical style.

34 The young performers’ initial answers to the question included: “Give more money to the NHS”; “Every child be taught with kindness, patience and respect”; “Pay nurses more money. And the arts”; “Change the National Anthem to ‘When I Grow Up’”; “I’d make a day when there are no laws”; “ban smoking”; “Everyday of the week would have to be a cake day”; and “National Green Hair Day,” www.youtube.com/watch?v=MBRaC5ecxxw, accessed March 22, 2016.

35 My thanks to Kirsty Sedgman for encouraging me to look at the social media campaigns surrounding the production and for her help in gathering and analyzing audience responses.


37 At the time of writing, the latest social media campaign encouraged fans to submit their photos to the online “Matilda Pose Map,” allowing the company to demonstrate the global reach of the production. http://posemap.matildathemusical.com/?_ga=1.137881904.1204775967.1458566110, accessed March 24, 2016.


40 “He makes a July’s day short as December / And with his varying childness cures in me / Thoughts that would thick my blood.” The Winter’s Tale, 1.2.168–69.

41 Peter Hollindale, Signs of Childness in Children’s Books (Gloucester: Timble, 1997), 46.

42 See David Houston Wood, Time, Narrative and Emotion in Early Modern England (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 121.

43 Carol Chillington Rutter, Shakespeare and Child’s Play: Performing Lost Boys on Stage and Screen (London: Routledge, 2007), 112.


45 Rutter, Shakespeare and Child’s Play, 130.

46 Rutter refers to lines 62–65 and 67–74 of act 1, scene 2 of The Winter’s Tale.

47 Rutter, “Pyg, Moth and Little William.”

48 Rutter, “Pyg, Moth and Little William.”

49 Matthew Warchus and Dennis Kelly quoted in Cavendish. Child performers who have taken on the roles of Oliver, the Artful Dodger, or Billy Elliot might disagree with Warchus’s assessment of their size relative to that of Matilda.

50 Dahl, Matilda, 95. Dahl also uses Miss Honey to support his observations about Matilda’s lack of self-regard, as he notes: “Miss Honey marvelled at the child’s lack of conceit and self-consciousness” (174).

51 Judith Woods, “Can Four Matildas Fit into One Olivier?” telegraph.co.uk, April 6, 2012.

Director Matthew Warchus initially thought that the story which Kelly had introduced was actually Dahl’s. He noted, “I read it and thought, ‘This is brilliant. He has found another Roald Dahl short story and he’s entwined it in Matilda and solved the structural problem [with the episodic nature of the novel].’ It’s such a fantastic piece of writing–you’d swear it was Dahl.” Quoted in Cavendish.

Mrs. Phelps’s emotional engagement with Matilda’s storytelling is amplified by Matilda’s descriptions of the audience reactions to the circus act being tempted by the acrobat and escapologist. She tells Mrs. Phelps and the audience listening in the theater: “The audience gasped so loud that a passing aeroplane caught it on its instrumentation and recorded it as an atmospheric phenomenon.”


2 Philip Kern, Susan Kern and Eric Jacobson, When the Hippos Crashed the Dance (Houston, TX: Houston Publishers, 1988). This score was incorporated into Hal Leonard’s catalog in 1991 but is now out of print.


4 My souvenir videocassette had a recording of our performance of When the Hippos Crashed the Dance followed by a recording of Woody Allen’s one-act play Death, featuring an early performance by Original Kids’ most famous former company member, Rachel McAdams.

5 Karen MacDonald, the director of Kidlets for Original Kids, commented that musicals designed for elementary schools are a great fit for the Kidlets program in their short length, small vocal range, and positive messages. She is especially a fan of the Hal Leonard musicals by John Jacobson and John Higgins, written for students in kindergarten to grade 3. Karen MacDonald, personal communication, February 23, 2016. See also http://originalkids.ca/kidlets.html.

6 John Jacobson, interview, January 25, 2016. All subsequent quotes are from this interview.

7 See Life after Tomorrow, a 2008 documentary about the women who played orphans when they were children in productions of Annie. Julie Stevens and Gil Cates, Jr., Life After Tomorrow (Arts Alliance America, 2007), DVD.
8 See www.dramaticpublishing.com/.
12 Roger Emerson interview, January 18, 2016. All subsequent quotes from Emerson are from this interview.
14 Philip Kern interview, January 20, 2016. All subsequent quotes are from this interview.
15 MENC was founded in 1907 and is now called the National Association for Music Education. Its publications include the *Journal of Research in Music Education* and *Music Educators Journal* among others. In Canada, the Canadian Music Educators’ Association provides similar support and research to music educators in the classroom. See http://cmea.ca/. Internationally, the Music in Schools and Teacher Education Commission of the International Society for Music Education has a mission to support music educators so that students are receiving the best possible music education in their schools.
17 McCarthy, 143; and see especially item 5 of MENC *Child’s Bill of Rights in Music*: “As their right, all children must have the opportunity to study music of diverse periods, styles, forms, and cultures, including samples of the various musics of the world and music that reflects the multimusical nature of our pluralistic American culture,” www.nafme.org/my-classroom/journals-magazines/nafme-online-publications/childs-bill-of-rights/.
19 Jacobson has over 800 publications on the Hal Leonard website, including choral arrangements, elementary musicals, and teen musicals. See the link to Hal Leonard publications on Jacobson’s website http://johnjacobson.com/
22 Andrew Tribe interview, January 18, 2016. All subsequent quotes are from this interview.

23 Kern mentioned that his brother-in-law recorded most of the musicals that he wrote with Susan: “They recorded with professional voices here in Indianapolis. A lot of places use singers here; they all come to Indianapolis because the studios through the years have established themselves as the place where Alfred and Hal Leonard and a bunch of other smaller houses, religious houses, come here to record.” Kern interview.

24 Jacobson noted, “I’ve got teachers that come up to me and say ‘I’ve done Bugz with my first graders every year for the past 20 years.’ And I think—I would shoot myself! Maybe you want to branch out a little bit. I know they mean it as a compliment, and I’m happy they’re excited about it. Once they’ve learned how to do it, they kind of just want to do what they know.”

25 Lautzenheiser is a musician and pedagogue who has written numerous guides for music instruction and has also written extensively about music and memory. See Tim Lautzenheiser, The Joy of Inspired Teaching (Chicago, IL: GIA Publications, 1993); Everyday Wisdom for Inspired Teaching (Chicago, IL: GIA Publications, 2006); and Music Advocacy and Student Leadership: Key Components of Every Successful Music Program: A Collection of Writings (Chicago, IL: GIA Publications, 2005).


30 John Jacobson et al., We Honor You: A Salute to America’s Soldiers and Veterans (Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard, 2006), www.halleonard.com/product/viewproduct.action?itemid=225506, also hear samples of the songs here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=qaNyDITO19E

31 From the Bad Wolf website: “Bad Wolf was started in 1995 by lyricist John Heath and composer Ron Fink. Their shows are filled with facts (i.e., mandated curriculum) but the story and the humor combined with music and rhyme do their stuff to help your kids understand and retain what they need to remember.” www.songsforteaching.com/store/bad-wolf-press-c-302.html.

34 Calvert, 274.
35 See the original video on YouTube at https://youtu.be/dm7yAWpX1Mc.
36 Indeed, Jacobson and Hal Leonard have since taken the fame of “Double Dream Hands” and redirected the traffic to their own websites with a dedicated website to the video: www.doubledreamhandsdance.com/.
41 Tribe interview.
42 Ryan, 62.
43 Kate Lewicki, “Satisfying Multiple Intelligences and Diverse Talents Through Musical Theater,” Middle School Journal 34, no. 2 (2002): 42.

1 Tamika, Daniel, and all of the kids and adults connected with theater groups in this essay are composites based on interviews with Casper Children’s Theater (WY), Center Stage Productions (MI), Holly Performance Academy (GA), Roy Waldron School Drama Team (TN), Spotlight Theatre Productions (FL), Treehouse Theater (WI) in May and June 2014, and Moorestown Theater Company (NJ) in January 2013. The names of the adults who work for iTheatrics and MTI are real. I observed some of these situations when I attended the 2013 Junior Theatre Festival. Other situations are based on descriptions from interviews.
7 www.mtishows.com/content.asp?id=1_2_0, accessed August 31, 2015. Also see Riis, Frank Loesser.
9 Carol Edelson, personal interview, New York, October 19, 2012. The other half is professional productions.
14 Robert Lee, personal phone interview, August 27, 2015. Subsequent quotes are from this interview.
15 Lee interview.
16 Quoted in Papatola, 14.
17 Lee interview.
19 Papatola, 13.
21 Michelle K. Moore, personal email, August 19, 2015.
22 Papatola, 13.
23 Nodelman, 132.
24 MTI has also developed School Editions of some titles—full-length, cleaned-up versions for high schools. These include Rent and Les Misérables, for example. On the pilot production Rent School Edition at Stagedoor Manor summer camp, see Mickey Rapkin, Theater Geek: The Real Life Drama of a Summer at Stagedoor Manor, the Famous Performing Arts Camp Theater Geek (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010).
27 Though MTI licenses and sells the product, Disney creates its own JR. and KIDS’ scripts and their “ShowKit” materials. See Stacy Wolf, “Not Only on Broadway: Disney JR. and Disney KIDS Across the USA,” The Disney Musical: Stage, Screen, and Beyond, ed. George Rodosthenous (London: Methuen Bloomsbury, 2017), 133–51.
28 Papatola, 13.
29 Gershon, personal interview.
Also see David Kamp, “The Glee Generation,” New York Times (June 11, 2010), who writes, “What is more, boys are applying in ever-greater numbers to the point that two years ago [2008], the camp was compelled to expand the boys’ sleeping areas by 20 beds,” www.nytimes.com/2010/06/13/fashion/13Cultural.html?_r=0, accessed August 19, 2015.


Some of this material is differently contextualized in Wolf, “Not Only on Broadway.”

Lee, phone interview.


The importance of musicians takes on the opposite valence at adult community theaters, as they’re typically paid to play while actors perform without monetary compensation.

In 2013, discussion was underway to expand the repertoire and not require groups to perform only MTI titles, so this isn’t the end of this story.
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