

## The Musical

Musicals are the most popular form of theatrical entertainment today. The musical tells a story through a combination of spoken words, songs, and dances. This specialized form first appeared in the United States in the mid-1800s.

Most historians agree that the first musical was *The Black Crook*, which was first performed in 1866. The early musicals had a strong European influence. Rudolf Frimel, Sigmund Romberg, and Victor Herbert were the three major composers of musicals at the beginning of the twentieth century. Important musicals written by these three European-born composers include *Naughty Marietta*, *The Red Mill*, *The Student Prince*, and *Rose Marie*.

In the early 1900s, George M. Cohan was the first major American-born composer of musicals. *Little Johnny Jones* and *Forty-Five Minutes from Broadway* were two important Cohan shows. Cohan wrote many famous patriotic songs including "You're a Grand Old Flag," "Yankee Doodle Boy," and "Over There."

Jerome Kern, George and Ira Gershwin, Irving Berlin, Cole Porter, and others soon joined Cohan as important American writers of musicals. Most of the popular music of the time came from Broadway musicals. Kern joined with Oscar Hammerstein II and author Edna Ferber in 1927 to write and produce the musical, *Showboat*, one of the most important musicals ever written. Unlike earlier musicals, it contained serious subject matter and was presented in a realistic manner. One of the greatest songs in the history of the musical, "Old Man River," came from this show. *Of Thee I Sing*, written by George and Ira Gershwin in 1932, was the first musical to win the Pulitzer Prize.

*Oklahoma!*, by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II, opened on Broadway in 1943. The combination of story, music, and dance into a smooth, unified whole was a new development in musicals. Rodgers and Hammerstein dominated the musical theater for the next several years, writing such musicals as *The King and I* and *The Sound of Music*.

During the 1950s and 1960s many other musicals had major successes. Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe wrote *My Fair Lady* and *Camelot*. *West Side Story*, by Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim, was one of the more serious musicals of the era. *Fiddler on the Roof* established a Broadway record of over 3,000 performances. Just a few years later, Michael Bennett's *A Chorus Line* broke that record.

Stephen Sondheim is a major figure in modern musical theater. His career began with *West Side Story* and has continued with successes such as *Company*, *A Little Night Music*, and *Sweeney Todd*. His musicals often contain unusual subject matter and musical treatments.

Englishman Andrew Lloyd Webber is also important in modern musical history. Webber's musicals include *Cats*, *Phantom of the Opera*, and *Evita*.



Rodger's and Hammerstein's  
*The Sound of Music*

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Questions for Consideration**

1. What do most historians agree was the first musical?

---

2. What three composers wrote in the European style?

---

3. Who was the first major American-born writer of musicals?

---

4. What was the name of one of his shows?

---

5. What show contained the song "Old Man River"?

---

6. What was the first musical to win a Pulitzer Prize?

---

7. Who was the most famous partner of Oscar Hammerstein II?

---

8. Name two of their most famous shows.

---

9. Who wrote *West Side Story*, *Company*, and *A Little Night Music*?

---

10. What musical was the first to have over 3,000 performances on Broadway?

---

11. What was the title of Michael Bennett's famous musical?

---

12. Who wrote *Cats* and *Phantom of the Opera*?

---