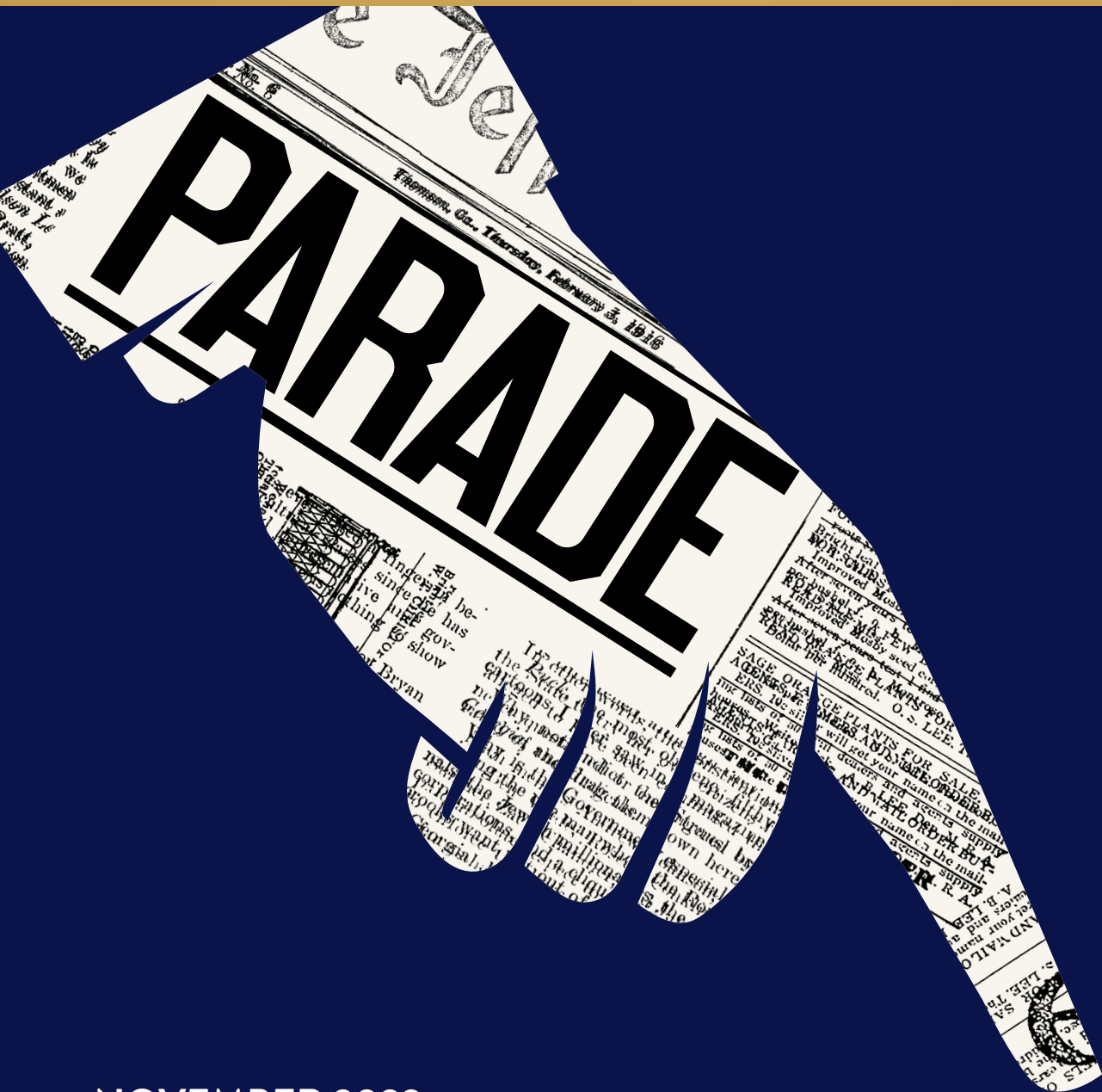


NEW YORK CITY CENTER EDUCATION



NOVEMBER 2022

BEHIND THE CURTAIN: PARADE

Your personal guide to the production.



Art by Ben Wiseman



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MEET THE CREATORS



JASON ROBERT BROWN (Music & Lyrics)

has written the scores for some of the most influential musicals of the past 30 years, including *Songs for a New World*—which was revived at City Center Encores! Off-Center in 2018—*Parade* (Best Score Tony Award), *The Last Five Years*, *13*, *The Bridges of Madison County* (Best Score and Best Orchestrations Tony Awards), *Honeymoon In Vegas*, and last season's *Mr. Saturday Night* (lyrics by Amanda Green). *The Last Five Years* and *13* have been adapted into films. Jason tours the world as a singer and pianist, and his songs, including “Hope,” “Someone To Fall Back On,” and “Stars and the Moon,” have been recorded by hundreds of artists including Ariana Grande, Shoshana Bean, Betty Buckley, Jennifer Nettles, Brandi Carlile, Billy Porter, and Audra McDonald. His latest musical, *The Connector*, directed by his longtime collaborator Daisy Prince, opens off-Broadway this spring. He is a proud member of the American Federation of Musicians Local 802 and the Dramatists Guild, and he lives in Nyack with his daughters and his wife, composer Georgia Stitt.



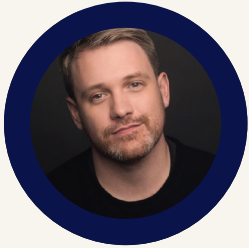
ALFRED UHRY (Book)

is distinguished as the only American playwright to have won a Pulitzer Prize, an Academy Award, and two Tony Awards. A 1958 graduate of Brown University, he began his professional career as a lyric writer under contract to the late Frank Loesser. He made his Broadway debut in 1968 with *Here's Where I Belong*, which ran for one night. He had better luck with *The Robber Bridegroom* in 1976, which won him his first Tony nomination. He followed that with five recreated musicals at the Goodspeed Opera House in East Haddam, Connecticut. His first play was *Driving Miss Daisy*, which began life at the 74-seat upstairs theatre at Playwrights Horizons in 1987 and went on to run for three years and won the Pulitzer Prize in 1988. The film version, starring Morgan Freeman and Jessica Tandy, won the Academy Award as Best Picture of 1989 and gained Uhry his own Oscar for best screenplay. His next two Broadway outings won him Tony Awards: *The Last Night Of Ballyhoo* (Best Play of 1997); and *Parade* (Best Book of a Musical in 1999). In 2014 he was inducted into both The Theatre Hall of Fame and the Georgia Writers Hall of Fame.



HAL PRINCE (Co-Conceived, Director of Original Broadway Production)

directed the original productions of *Cabaret*, *Sweeney Todd: the Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, *A Little Night Music*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, *She Loves Me*, *Company*, *Follies*, *Candide*, *Pacific Overtures*, *Evita*, *Parade*, *LoveMusik* and *Paradise Found*. Before becoming a director, Hal Prince's productions included: *The Pajama Game*, *Damn Yankees*, *West Side Story*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Fiorello!* and *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*. Among the plays he directed are *Hollywood Arms*, *The Visit*, *The Great God Brown*, *End of the World*, *Play Memory* and his own play, *Grandchild of Kings*. He prepared a new version of *Phantom*, which ran in Las Vegas at the Venetian Hotel from 2006 to 2012. His opera productions were seen at Lyric Opera of Chicago, the Metropolitan Opera, San Francisco Opera, Houston Grand Opera, Dallas Opera, Vienna Staatsoper and the Teatro Colon in Buenos Aires. *Prince of Broadway*, a musical compendium of Mr Prince's entire career, opened in Tokyo in 2015 and on Broadway in 2017. Mr. Prince was a trustee for the New York Public Library and previously served on the National Council on the Arts for the NEA. Mr Prince was named an officer in the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres. He was the recipient of 21 Tony Awards, a Kennedy Center Honor, and a National Medal of the Arts from President Clinton for a career in which “he changed the nature of the American musical.”



MICHAEL ARDEN (Director)

is a two-time Tony-nominated director for his revivals of *Spring Awakening* and *Once On This Island* (which won the 2018 Tony for Best Revival). He won the Outer Critics Circle Award for Outstanding Director of a Musical and was nominated for a Drama Desk Award for his production of *Spring Awakening*. Arden made his Broadway debut as an actor in Deaf West Theater and Roundabout Theatre Company's production of *Big River*. Other directing credits include *ALIEN/NATION* (Williamstown Theatre Festival), *The Connors* (ABC), *A Christmas Carol* at the Geffen, *Annie* at The Hollywood Bowl, *My Fair Lady* at Bay Street Theater, *The Pride*, and *Merrily We Roll Along* at the Wallis Annenberg Center in Los Angeles, where he is currently the Artist in Residence. Arden is an alum of The Interlochen Arts Academy and The Juilliard School. In addition to his work as a director, he is the founder and Artistic Director of THE FOREST OF ARDEN, a diverse Company of multidisciplinary artists, designers, musicians, writers, stage managers, and filmmakers who strive to devise immersive, imaginative, and provocative theatrical experiences with an emphasis on site-specific work and innovating technologies while serving communities and the people in them.



CREE GRANT (Choreographer)

originally from Mississippi, is a NYC based performer/choreographer alongside his wife Lauren Yalango-Grant. Their work (@creelomoves) can be seen in live theater, TV, and film. Grant received his BFA from the University of Southern Mississippi in Dance Performance and Choreography. He began his career with Pilobolus Dance Theater. This environment deeply shaped the way he contributes to creative processes today. Cree has made multiple national and international TV and film appearances including *tick tick ... BOOM!*, *In the Heights*, Apple holiday commercial, 'Sway,' and Advil PM commercial 'Dancing Around Pain.' He was also in the original cast of *King Kong Alive* on Broadway.



TOM MURRAY (Music Director)

Broadway/New York City: *Anastasia*, *Honeymoon In Vegas*, *The Bridges of Madison County*, *Nice Work If You Can Get It*, *A Little Night Music*, *Sunday in the Park with George*, *Songs For A New World* (Encores! Off-Center). London: *The Bridges of Madison County* (Menier Chocolate Factory), *A Little Night Music* (Garrick Theatre), *Parade* (Donmar), *Pacific Overtures* (Donmar), *The Last Five Years* (St. James Theatre). Premieres: *Knoxville* (Ahrens/Flaherty, Asolo Rep), *Bedknobs and Broomsticks* (UK), *The Flamingo Kid* (Hartford Stage), *The Last Five Years* (New York, London, film), *The Glorious Ones* (Ahrens/Flaherty), *Loving Repeating* (Flaherty), *Saturday Night* (US premiere). *Pacific Overtures* (Chicago Shakespeare), *Sweeney Todd*, *Passion*, *Anyone Can Whistle* (Ravinia Festival, Chicago). Recipient of four Joseph Jefferson Awards (Chicago) and one Barrymore Award (Philadelphia) for music-direction. Future projects: *The Connector* (Jason Robert Brown), *Bedknobs and Broomsticks* (West End), *Farewell, My Concubine* (Jason Robert Brown).

MEET THE CHARACTERS



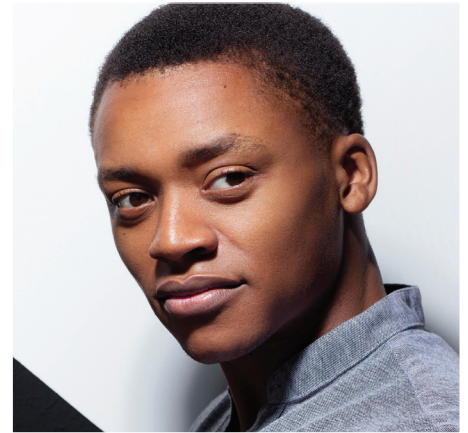
**LEO FRANK
(BEN PLATT)**

A Jewish factory manager in Marietta, Georgia accused of murdering teenager Mary Phagan



**LUCILLE FRANK
(MICAELA DIAMOND)**

the young wife of Leo Frank, an assimilated Southern Jewish woman who becomes her husband's most vocal crusader



**JIM CONLEY
(ALEX JOSEPH GRAYSON)**

the janitor at the factory and a key witness in the trial



**NEWT LEE
(EDDIE COOPER)**

the factory night watchman who finds the body of Mary Phagan



**MARY PHAGAN
(ERIN ROSE DOYLE)**

a young factory worker who has been murdered



**FRANKIE EPPS
(GATEN MATARAZZO)**

a local teen and friend of Mary Phagan

Many of the characters we encounter throughout the musical were based on real people. Meet the characters and the actors who will portray them in the show.



**HUGH DORSEY
(PAUL ALEXANDER NOLAN)**

the prosecutor in the
Leo Frank trial



**LUTHER ROSSER
(HOWARD MCGILLIN)**

Leo Frank's lawyer



**JUDGE ROAN
(JOHN DOSSETT)**

the judge presiding over
Leo Frank's trial



**GOVERNOR JOHN SLATON
(SEAN ALLAN KRILL)**

the Governor of Georgia
from 1913 – 1915



**TOM WATSON
(MANOEL FELICIANO)**

a newspaper writer and editor
covering the case



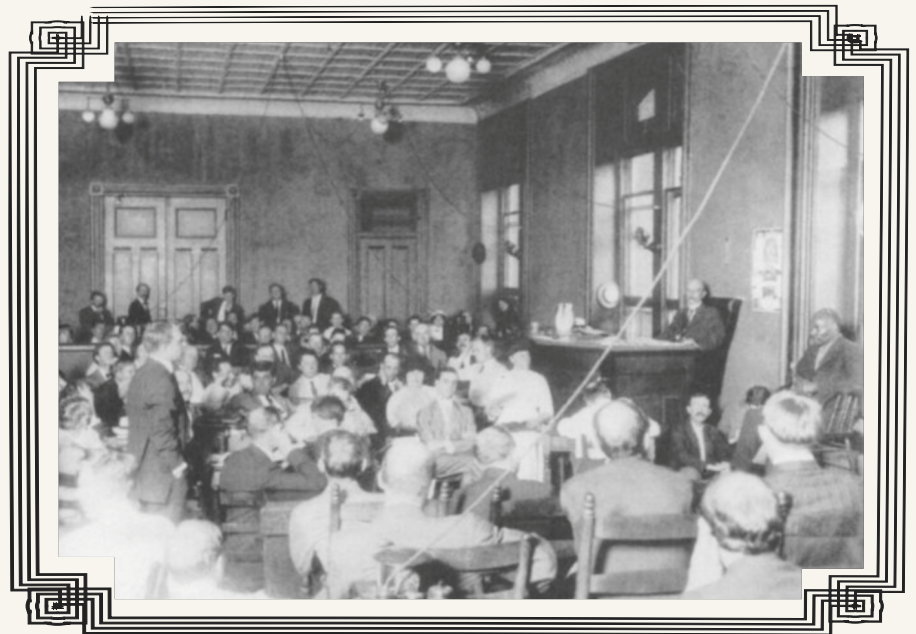
**BRITT CRAIG
(JAY ARMSTONG JOHNSON)**

a reporter covering the case



Interview with *Parade* Director, Michael Arden

Tony-nominated director Michael Arden makes his New York City Center debut with this production of *Parade*. We spoke with Mr. Arden about his career, his approach to adapting the events of a historical tragedy for the musical stage, and how he hopes the audience will find the light amidst the darkness of this story.



Michael Arden; photo by Luke Fontana
Archival courtroom image

“I believe that love is the inverse of fear. And in *Parade*, we get an opportunity to grapple with both.”


How did you become a director? Well, I always was bossy as a child, so it makes complete sense. When I was young I used to have the neighborhood kids put on plays in the backyard that I would put together. It was always about trying to create a new world with my friends and our imaginations. But in terms of something real, I was living in Los Angeles acting on a television series called *Anger Management*. We shot 100 episodes of the show and during that time, I was really missing theater and I knew that a lot of my friends were as well. So, I sort of sat myself down and wrote an adaptation of Schnitzler’s play *La Ronde* for my friends in LA who missed theater. I raised money on Kickstarter and put together the production. It was site-specific and immersive, and people came to see it! I could only have 10 people in the audience each night, that’s how small it was, but those people were incredibly supportive. After that, Deaf West reached out to me and asked if I would ever want to direct something for them, and my husband suggested that I direct *Spring Awakening*. I proposed that idea and again raised

money on Kickstarter. I used my own furniture and clothes—some of which I still haven’t gotten back—and the rest is history!

I had assisted and shadowed quite a bit. I assisted Warren Carlyle on *A Tale of Two Cities* on Broadway, I shadowed the producers on *Newsies*, and I interned as a lighting designer. I have always wanted to look at theater from as many angles as possible. The more I know about someone else’s work, the more I can understand my own. I really credit all of those things and having a lot of supporters on the way who really believed in me, and gave me opportunities to shadow them.

What is your favorite part about your job? I think my favorite part of being a director is being able to create environments where performers, designers, and technicians can achieve their best work while feeling uninhibited to stretch beyond what they’ve done prior. Every so often I am lucky enough to take on an acting job so that I remember what it’s like to be on the other side of the proscenium. It’s extremely hard and often emotionally stressful. I have such respect for actors and never want to lose sight of that perspective in my work as a director.

Almost a quarter of a century later, *Parade’s* battle cry to reexamine the bitter roots of American bigotry couldn’t be timelier. What drew you to the piece initially and did you feel a sense of obligation to present the material in a new way given the world today? I first fell in love with *Parade* as a high schooler in Midland, Texas. From the moment I first heard the opening number on the cast album, I was a fan. Like so many musical theater lovers who grew up outside New York in the time before the Internet, Best Buy was my Shubert Alley. I was fascinated with the story of *Parade*. The murder of Mary Phagan and subsequent lynching of Leo Frank certainly wasn’t something I had been taught in History class in West Texas. As I tried to piece the story together from the compact disc liner notes, I remember being amazed that a musical




could tackle such subject matter and dramatically humanize it. I found Jason's score both terrifying and heartbreaking, and Alfred's characters honest, complex, and surprising. It quickly became one of my favorite musicals—a score I was obsessed with, and a story that both frightened and fascinated me.

Soon after, I moved to New York to attend The Juilliard School and spent as much time as legally possible inside the Lincoln Center Performing Arts Library, where I was able to watch the archival recording of the Lincoln Center production of *Parade*. My mind was blown. Hal Prince's beautiful staging and the brilliant company led by Carolee Carmello and the late great Brent Carver added even more fuel to the fire of my interest in the show. *Parade* opened a world of possibility in my mind in which musicals were able to tackle dark and real stories that could pull at the strings of our hidden prejudices, traumas, and still-reverberating shame.

I feel that in approaching *Parade* now at City Center, I don't need to reinvent the piece. My task is to starkly and clearly present a dramatically exciting and honest exploration of this sensational story to audiences so that might become active participants in the proceedings. What I love about this *Parade*, and why I think I most wanted to direct it, is that it's not as concerned with attributing guilt or innocence as it is examining how America's cyclical traumatic history has so often distorted and weaponized the ideals of justice to which we pledge allegiance.

When adapting a musical derived from a historical event, what is your process? As a director, I want to know as much about the history surrounding a play as possible. I want to know about the time period, what the people wore, what the locations



looked like, what the living conditions were, and what the political and social landscape was at the time. So, I start by doing as much research as I can and then try to put myself in the shoes of all the characters and imagine what they're going through without judgement.

It's the same thing an actor does when they're approaching a role—only in a way, it's my job to play all the roles, and the audience, all at once. It's my job to imagine not only how to most clearly represent the reality of a time and place, but to do it in a way that serves the story. Ultimately, I'm not here to educate the audience; I'm here to take them on an emotional ride and let them make their own decisions. But I can only do that if I build the world honestly and keep all elements of the production in service of the story as much as possible, so the audience feels that safety net and takes the leap.

With *Parade*, I really want to remind the audience that the story they're becoming invested in—and the characters that they are witnessing go through incredible difficulties, hardships, and loss (though dramatized)—were real people. They were like us. They lived; they breathed; they have descendants who are still alive and feel the pain of the past; and their actions, in small ways, have shaped our country's story. I really want to try to present the human truth in our history, the stark reminder that real-life events can cause a chain reaction that has led to where we are today, as well as an emotional story that the audience might lose themselves in. We will never be able to know every detail of what happened in this story, the full truth from each character's perspective, and therefore I have to acknowledge this is both a piece of fiction and nonfiction. For me, what matters is the interrogation, not the verdict.

What do you hope audiences come away with after seeing your production of *Parade*? I hope audiences come away reflecting not only upon the tragic events that occurred more than 100 years ago in Georgia, but on how both our present personal and collective actions are so often reactions to the echoes of the collective trauma of America's past. It's indeed an endless parade. I hope people take away the idea that there are deeply complex social issues at play under the sensational headlines and verdicts, and that real lives have been lost and continue to be lost because of them. In a way, this story is the reverberation of an unfinished Civil War. I want to show that we are still very much grappling with an incredibly complicated past that is capable of manifesting itself in both wonderful and horrific ways. Without really knowing and trying to understand our history, we are doomed to repeat it again and again.

If there is one thing you could share with our student audience before seeing the show, what would you want them to know? I want them to know that the story they're about to see is based on incredibly real events, but that we can never fully know what's going on in someone else's life. I think we have to approach any situation, with any individual besides ourselves, with a great deal of empathy and a great deal of care, and completely open eyes, ears, and minds. We can try to understand someone else by imagining what it's like to see the world through their perspective. You can never completely know everything about someone, so you have to lead with grace when approaching another human being, and try to use empathy as an outreach. It's difficult enough to understand ourselves, much less someone else.

As the director of this production, how will you help your audiences to find the light in such a dark moment in the history of this country? Well, we see horrific things presented here: the murder of an innocent child occurs in this play. But surrounding all that sadness, grief, and horror, we do see people trying to do good; we see people creating empathy both within and outside of themselves; we see people helping each other; and ultimately in this play, we see love. That's the hope in this piece: that love can exist, and empathy can exist, even in the darkest of times. Those moments of love against all odds—that's how we climb out of despair. In *Parade*, love is manifested in different ways: the love of justice, the love of country, the love of our fellow citizens. I firmly believe that love is the inverse of fear. And luckily for us, in *Parade*, we get an opportunity to grapple and grow with both.





Interview with *Parade* Librettist, Alfred Uhry

Playwright, screenwriter, lyricist and librettist Alfred Uhry's work has graced stages and screens across the country. We spoke to Mr. Uhry about the joys and challenges of being a writer, the development process, and his personal connection to *Parade*.

When and how did you know that you wanted to become a writer?

As soon as I could read, I wanted to write about it because it was so much more exciting than life itself. I just wanted to be in that imaginary world. In grammar school, I used to write plays. I don't remember them ever being put on, but I had this wonderful teacher and I remember her encouraging me to do it. They were my versions of fairy tales or old stories like *Hans Brinker or the Silver Skates*, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* or *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. I was a big reader, so I just wanted to translate Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* and write these childish plays about it, and she encouraged me to do it. It was always the path for me.

What part of your job gives you the most joy? What part of your job is the most challenging?

The most challenging part is getting it on the page. When you're alone with yourself and the material, sometimes it's hard to get up the nerve to keep going or you look at what you've written and think "I don't like this" and put it down. I believe that Hemingway said that when you're writing it's very good to stop at a place where you feel excited about it, as opposed to when you're stuck because then you can't wait to get back to it the next day. What's hard about it is you have only yourself to blame. When it's not working and your mind is stuck, it's not somebody else's fault, it's yours, and that's hard.

And the most fun part of theater is rehearsal: when it's going well, and you've got a committed director and actors working on it. It's sort of like getting an athletic team ready to go out on a field. Everyone is committed to the same thing. That's why I like doing musicals because there are more people to collaborate with. I'm not a musician. I can sort of carry a tune, but I have no sense of time. All that is not available to me inside my head. But with a collaborator like Jason Robert Brown who listens to

how I feel about something—particularly this material, which was so close to me—and uses his talent to break that out, it's a very happy experience.

Does your writing process differ when working on a libretto vs. a play?

If you're doing a libretto for a musical, or the book, you have to realize that the composer/lyricist is going to take your best stuff and use it and it won't be by you, it'll be by him or her. It's not like writing a play, it's more collaborative. Because in a play, it's you and then a director and then the cast. But from the get-go with a musical, it's you and the composer and lyricist, which in this case was Jason. Once I knew that the Leo Frank story was going to be a musical, I understood that was going to happen and I was happy to be a part of this process.

Hal Prince was the one who said it should be a musical. I had written a play called *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, which is about Jews who aren't so happy being Jews in the South. Hal and I were friends and he said "How could all that happen in Atlanta? Why is it so endemic to a place like that?" And I said "Well, I guess it's because of the Leo Frank case." And he said, "I know a little bit about it but tell me what it was." So I told him the basic tenets of the story. He put his glasses on the top of his head and said, "That's a musical." That really happened. I think I had always known that the story had dramatic possibilities. I'd always felt that as soon as I knew what the story was. I was frightened about it, but I knew it was the right thing to do because it was going places where musical theater doesn't usually go.

How did historical research factor into *Parade's* original development process?

It was a story that had been with me my whole life. My grandmother, who lived with us when I was growing up, had been a social friend of Leo and Lucille Frank. I knew enough about the story

that whenever the name Leo Frank would come up in conversation, not just with my family but with family friends, generations older than me, certain people would get up and walk out of the room and say, “I don’t want to talk about that.” When I got old enough, I guess that’s around 11 or 12, I was able to get on the bus and go to the library and look it up in the files and read about it. There was a book that came out about the case, which I read as a teenager, and it kind of just became a part of what I knew about. Time went by, but it was always something in the back of my mind that I cared about.

The more I worked with Jason and Hal, the more I realized that this case was like a ripple in a pond, it got bigger and bigger. Nobody won anything except for the people who exploited it. Sadly, nowadays we still have that. We have people stirring up people who feel aggrieved and will act on it. That’s more the case right now than when we wrote the show in the first place.

Why do you think it’s important to revive *Parade* in this moment?

Just because of that, it speaks to the moment. It says you can stir up a lot of trouble by exploiting a tragic situation. It was undeniably tragic that a young girl was murdered. She was working for 10 cents an hour in a factory, not going to school because she had to support her family.

The other part of it that I really didn’t understand when I was a boy in Atlanta was that these were people who believed in their cause, lost the war, and believed they lived in an occupied country for most of their lives.

When we worked on it, Jason had maybe flown over the South to go to Miami, but he had certainly never lived there and been a part of it. We talked for months, and I told him how it felt to be Southern and what I’d grown up with people feeling, and the amazing thing about Jason was that he really

listened. The other amazing thing is how talented he is and how he’s able to translate that into this music. It was months before he wrote anything for me to hear. He finally called me and said, “I’ve got something.” I remember it was snowing and I went over to his apartment. He played me that first number and I was in tears. I’m not a person who cries easily. He got it. It’s not always the case that people I collaborate with get it. It’s sort of like a romance, either it works or it doesn’t. This partnership worked and it still does. Also, the fact that Michael Arden is Southern means a lot to me. Most people don’t completely understand how Southerners felt; they just tend to look at anybody from the South, even now, as right-wing loons.

If there is one thing you could share with our student audience before seeing the production, what would you want them to know?

I want them to know that this really happened and that there is something to learn and hopefully gain from it. To never see it happen this way again. It’s a story in which you care about the people involved, who were swept up by this thing. The way it’s told, you don’t exactly know whether Leo Frank did it or not, but you pretty much know that he didn’t. But it’s never really said, so it leaves a lot of things unexplained. You don’t exactly know who murdered the little girl. All that is floating around in the story, which is powerful. And the music makes it even more powerful.

It boils down to good, strong entertainment—which doesn’t mean that it all has to be sunshine. We’re telling a very human story. And there have been musicals that came before and after it, like *West Side Story*, *Carousel*, or *Hamilton*, that are similar in the sense that powerful material doesn’t necessarily have to end happily.

Because *Parade* is adapted from history, here are some resources that help contextualize post-Civil War America and the events surrounding Leo Frank's trial and subsequent lynching.

guides.loc.gov/chronicling-america-leo-frank

archives.gov/education/lessons/frank-petition.html

history.com/topics/american-civil-war/reconstruction

britannica.com/summary/The-Progressive-Era-Timeline

Career Spotlight: DRAMATURG



As Ashley mentions, a dramaturg’s job can take many forms, all utilizing their knowledge of and skills in research, history, literature, and analysis. Whatever their role, dramaturgs are invaluable contributors and essential to the production process. Some dramaturgs are freelancers, working with a variety of organizations on different projects, while others obtain permanent positions with theaters’ artistic and literary teams.

MAIN RESPONSIBILITIES

- Collaborating with playwrights while writing and editing new works
- Reading play submissions
- Conducting, interpreting, and compiling extensive research relevant to an upcoming production
- Advising directors, designers and casts during a production process

Ashley M. Thomas is an artist, educator, and dramaturg from New York City. Completing her final year in the Dramaturgy and Dramatic Criticism MFA Program at David Geffen School of Drama at Yale, Ashley says, “There are so many possibilities for a career in the arts. I didn’t know what a dramaturg was until about six years ago, but once I did it was the best thing that happened to my career!” Read our conversation with Ashley to learn more about a career in dramaturgy:

What is a dramaturg?

Dramaturgs can be many things—artistic producers, literary managers, art critics, editors, production researchers, and academic scholars. They are both generalists and specialists who serve as a bridge between the world of the play and the production, classroom, or general public. Dramaturgs are artists who study theater history as well as current trends in arts and culture. There’s so much versatility in how a dramaturg shows up depending on the project.

What does a dramaturg do? How do they contribute to a production?

There are two ways a dramaturg can work on a production: new play development and production dramaturg. In a new play development project, a dramaturg works closely with a playwright to dive into the play’s structure, characters, and themes. A dramaturg works with a playwright to refine their ideas and track prominent themes. In production dramaturgy, a dramaturg works closely with a director to assure the historical accuracy of an already established production, especially if the playwright is no longer alive or working on the project. A production dramaturg would typically conduct research in the archives about past productions, script variations or translations, and other relevant cultural information for which the play is set. The dramaturg would share this information with the cast and creative team to better help them understand the project. This does not mean that the dramaturg is necessarily an expert or an encyclopedia, but instead a collaborator ready to explore all the possibilities of the production.

What is the best part of your job as a dramaturg? What is the most challenging?

The best part of my job is being in a rehearsal room and watching a show develop from start to finish. Whether I'm watching a playwright get closer to a draft of a scene or watching an actor develop a deeper sense of understanding for their character, it's amazing to witness the evolution of an idea. Helping a director frame their vision back to the cast and working with a playwright to provide specific feedback on their show is an unmatched reward! The most challenging part of my job is explaining what dramaturgy is to collaborators who have either never worked with a dramaturg or have a limited understanding of what a dramaturg does. Dramaturgs can be wonderful collaborators in a rehearsal room or a consultant on a project, but if they aren't fully integrated into a process, it makes it very difficult for them to do their jobs effectively.

What advice do you have for aspiring dramaturgs?

I always recommend anyone who wants to get into dramaturgy to read plays, watch films and television, and/or indulge in books—basically consume art! Understanding what kind of art you like will make you a better dramaturg because you'll be working from a place of passion rather than a presumed pressure to be an expert. A knowledge of theater history, good textual analysis, and an ability to communicate verbal and written ideas help, but those aren't the only requirements—plus there are so many ways to acquire those skills informally. If you're looking for a way to start, perhaps you can host monthly reading clubs where you gather some theater friends and have them read plays and discuss them together so you can get used to analysis; check out a paid theater internship in an artistic, literary, or general management office to see how plays and productions come about; and lastly, write out your thoughts on a show, movie, or play you saw recently in a journal or blog to help develop your writing skills. Graduate school is an option, but not a requirement. What matters is the ability to collaborate and have an interest in storytelling. Dramaturgy is about heart work and people business.

RELEVANT SKILLS & INTERESTS

- Love of reading and writing
- Text analysis • Collaboration
- Passion for research
- Investment in the theatrical process, how plays and musicals come together
- Critical thinking
- Interest in languages, literature and theater history

CAREER PATHWAYS

Gain production experience! Offer to assist on school productions, either as a dramaturg or any position to get a better understanding of a production process.

Many colleges and universities offer degrees and concentrations in literature or directing, which can support helpful knowledge and skills for dramaturgy. Few offer degrees in dramaturgy at an undergraduate level, but there are more options in Masters programs, should you want to pursue a formal education in the field.

Look for opportunities to assist or apprentice under directors and dramaturgs in your area, either locally and/or professionally. It never hurts to send an email to an organization you admire; you never know where it will lead you!

Behind the Curtain guides are a dramaturgical resource, providing audiences with a deeper understanding of the creative process and the world of the production.

ACTIVITY 1

Most of us will experience something during our lifetimes that will alter how we look at the world around us. Those events could be very personal, like moving to a new city or losing a loved one; or they could happen on a much larger scale, like the release of a new Beyoncé album or a global pandemic.

Artists have used history as an influence for the creation of their work since the beginning of time. American musical theater has often looked to historical events to inspire some of its most well-known shows (which you can read about in the next article).

Can you think of a historical event that you'd like to see brought to life on stage? What makes a real event worthy of dramatization?

Use the prompts below to guide you through the basic building blocks of adapting a true story into a musical. Let's get started!

In the following activity, you will

STEP 1 Choose the event

STEP 2 Do your research

STEP 3 Identify the key elements

STEP 1 Choose the event

Decide on a historical or current event that will be the focus of your story. If you're in need of inspiration, do some research online and use the space below to list a few ideas based on what you find. Once you have several options, cross out the ideas that can be saved for another day, until you have your chosen subject.

STEP 2 Do your research

Time to put on your dramaturg hat. Find and list three (3) sources that discuss your chosen event. Sources can be newspaper articles, interviews, videos—anything that helps you get a clear image of what happened and how people are/were talking about it.

As you research, keep in mind that **at least one of your sources** must present a different perspective than the others, maybe in the form of a conflicting viewpoint, or a different political perspective. How are people telling the story differently, and what effect does that have on how you want to tell your theatrical version?

Tip: Check out chroniclingamerica.loc.gov from the Library of Congress to access some historic American newspapers from 1777 to 1963.





STEP 3 Identify the key elements

Who are the central characters? What is the setting of the story? Use the questions below to flesh out some of the important details that will shape your new musical.

The Setting: *Where will this story take place?*

The Characters: *Who is telling the story? Who are the supporting characters? Is there a villain?*

The Plot: *What happens in the story? For this activity, you can simply outline the Beginning (Exposition), Middle (Conflict/Climax) and End (Resolution).*

Exposition:

Conflict/Climax:

Resolution:

The Takeaway: *Is there a lesson that you want to teach? What do you want your audience to take with them after they see your musical?*

Our America on Stage:

When history makes the musical

By Jessica Goldschmidt

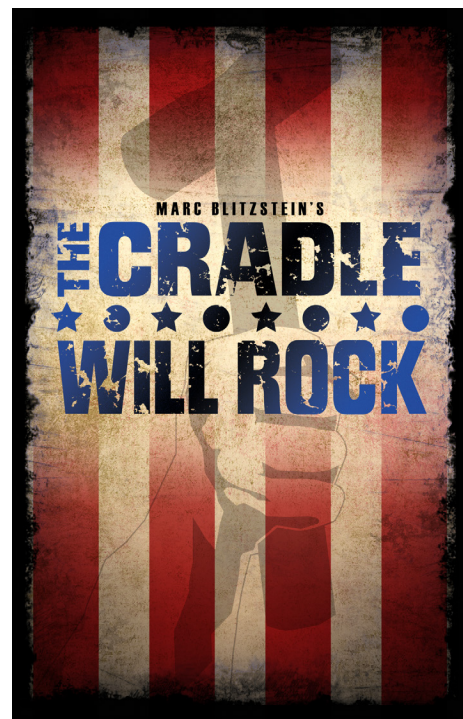
From ancient Greek choruses to medieval pageants and on through European opera, music has been a part of the Western theater tradition for centuries. But the “musical” as you know it—the Broadway musical, the high school musical—is a uniquely American form. In the 19th century, the vaudeville stages and music halls of American cities (and particularly New York) birthed a new method of theatrical storytelling that, over the course of nearly a century, evolved into the “book musicals” we see today. And as a culturally specific art form (like Spanish language telenovelas or Japanese noh theater), American musicals often incorporate this country’s history and mythology in ways you might not expect from a type of performance so associated with light comedy.

Before we get into some of the history of, well, American history as portrayed in musical theater, let’s further define the form itself and how it evolved from other types of performance. The “book musical” developed throughout the early 1900s from a combination of European operettas and musical revues—collections of popular songs strung together with comic

sketches and scenes. But it wasn’t until the Broadway production of *Show Boat* in 1927 that the book musical truly emerged. Instead of a musical comedy revue, this was a musical drama in which the songs were integrated with the story, advancing plot and character development even as they entertained; a performance that historian Mark Lubbock described as a “... complete integration of song, humor and production numbers into a single and inextricable artistic entity.”

Show Boat was a first in many ways, not least of which was its subject matter. While not directly dealing with major events in American history, it was adapted from a novel published only one year prior, in 1926, and written to chronicle the real-life (and rapidly fading) American tradition of Mississippi River “showboats”—steamers that featured nightly vaudevilian entertainments. *Show Boat*’s plot incorporated issues of race in America, specifically segregation and “miscegenation:” which, in 1927, was an existing legal term used to describe and criminalize interracial marriage in many states. Deeply American in its contradictions, *Show Boat* was the

first racially integrated Broadway musical even as its book and lyrics relied firmly on violent, racist language and racialized stereotypes. Nearly a hundred years later, as America still struggles to unearth our foundational bedrock of anti-Black racism, it seems uniquely fitting that the first American musical created some of that racist national history even as it tried to dramatize it.



Artwork by Paul Gaschler

Show Boat unwittingly captured something essential about the American national character; but later musicals attempted to di-

rectly address a host of social issues, from bigotry to gun violence to corporate greed. Ten years after *Show Boat* debuted, Marc Blitzstein’s *The Cradle Will Rock* presented a fable of unions doing battle with evil businessmen. The musical’s plot promoted a pro-union vision of American industry that might have been controversial in-and-of-itself; but its Broadway run was abruptly halted before opening night, creating a real-life controversy that echoed many of the show’s main themes. (*The Cradle Will Rock* opened anyway in a pared-down production and has been revived many times over the years—including at New York City Center, where in 2013 it became the first show in our Encores! Off Center series of musical revivals.)

Less dramatic examples of historically-engaged musicals pepper the next 30 years of Broadway history, until the tumult of the 1960s and the surprising success of *Hair*—the first “rock musical” and a controversial downtown New York sensation that transferred to Broadway in 1968. *Hair* dramatized history as it was being written, putting the anti-Vietnam War movements, drug trips, “be-ins,” and counterculture principles of the West Village’s Washington Square Park hippies directly on stage. In perhaps another instance of art imitating American life, *Hair* lost the 1969 Tony Award for Best Musical to another historically engaged production: *1776*, the story of the writing and signing of the Declaration of Independence.

Where *Hair* pushed theatrical boundaries with rock music, nudity, drug use, and homosexuality, *1776* presented a classically tuneful portrait of the Founding Fathers’ conflicts around American independence. Yet even *1776* tackles some deep contradictions in the American project, from the violence of the American Revolution to the brutal hypocrisies of slavery in both the Southern and Northern states. (City Center Encores! revived *1776* in 2016, and a new diverse cast is now performing the show on Broadway!)



Artwork by Fraver

In another confluence of history-focused productions, 1998 saw the opening of both *Ragtime*, a sweeping adaptation of E.L. Doctorow’s historical novel, and the original Broadway production of *Parade* (the musical you’ll be seeing at City Center). *Ragtime* attempts to capture a broad range

of early 20th century American history, from the Eastern European immigrant experience to the social codes of affluent white society to Booker T. Washington’s articulation of injustices against the Black American community. By contrast, *Parade* focuses specifically on one historical event: the trial, conviction, and eventual lynching of Leo Frank, a Jewish man accused of rape and murder in 1913 Georgia. Each of these musicals examines deep-rooted American issues of racial and religious discrimination, media hypocrisy, and hate-fueled violence—just through two wildly different-sized lenses.

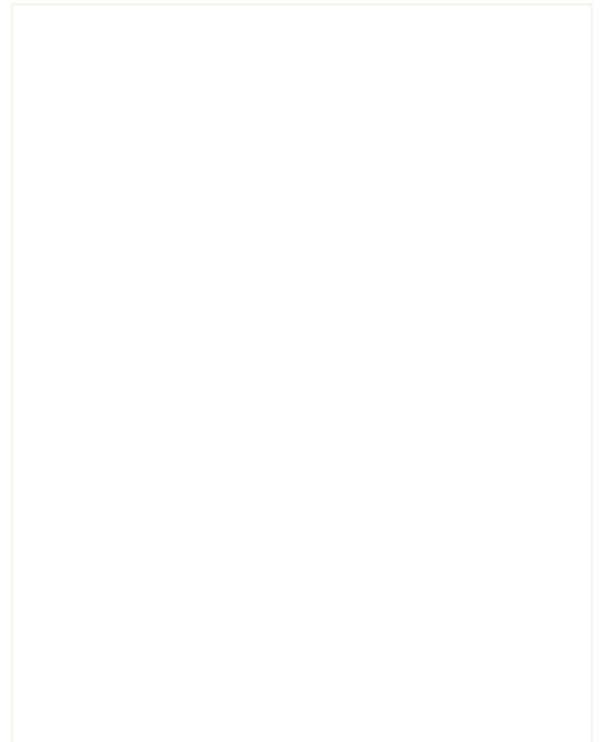
Today’s Broadway hits still include historically inclined productions; *Hamilton* is certainly the best-known current example. Yet just as *Parade* used a small lens to tell a larger story, other more laser-focused musicals are also doing the work of unpacking America’s more troubling historical legacies. Michael R. Jackson’s Pulitzer Prize-winning musical *A Strange Loop* tackles anti-Black racism, classism, and homophobia both within and outside the queer community without ever leaving the mind of its Black gay hero. Musical theater artists continue to find new and exciting ways to address national issues through this uniquely American form; and if today’s examples are any indication, the possibilities truly are endless.

Dramatize a moment from the event.

How would you **theatricalize** (to present something in a dramatic manner) this moment? Which characters are involved? This can be written just like a story, including as many details as you can imagine. Think big!

Design a costume or a set piece.

Lean into the visual elements of the story: What would one of the character's costumes look like? How can you design a set that will put your audience in the world of the story? Use the space below to sketch your costume or set piece.



Write a scene or a monologue.

Use what you've learned from your research to write a scene between two or more characters in your show. Or maybe you'd prefer to write a **monologue** (a speech for just one character). Keep in mind the time period and geographical location of your character(s); this may influence how they speak and interact with each other.

Write lyrics to a song for one of your characters.

In musicals, characters often sing when emotions bubble over because simply speaking is no longer enough. Write a **verse** (sets up the theme/shares story details) and a **chorus** (the central message; this will usually repeat more than once) for a song that one of your characters would sing during an important or emotional moment in your story.



GLOSSARY

MESHUGGENEH

Yiddish word for a crazy fool

Leo to Lucille: "Don't be such a meshuggeneh!"

YANKEE

an inhabitant of New England or one of the northern States

Leo about himself: "A Yankee with a college education..."

ARMAGEDDON

the site or time of a final and conclusive battle between the forces of good and evil

Watson: "Justice is nigh. Soon Armageddon comes."

INDICTED

formally accuse of or charge with a serious crime

Leo to his lawyer, Rosser: "Indicted? Does that mean there's going to be a trial?"

PROSECUTOR

a lawyer who conducts the case against a defendant in a criminal court

Craig, reporting on the events of the trial: "Prosecutor Dorsey has the villain in his sights."

OBJECTION

the action of challenging or disagreeing with something

Rosser in response to a statement made by the prosecution: "Objection!"

VERDICT

a decision on a disputed issue in a civil or criminal case

Judge Roan at the conclusion of the trial: "Gentlemen of the Jury, have you reached a verdict?"

RABBI

a Jewish religious leader

Leo: "My Rabbi's eulogy can wait..."

GALLOWS

a structure for the hanging of criminals

Leo: "It means the gallows still are vacant..."

CORONER

an official who investigates violent, sudden, or suspicious deaths

Slaton to Jim Conley: "Coroner's report raises questions about your story, would you say?"

Sh'ma Yisrael, Adonai eloheinu, adonai ehchad.

Baruch sheym k'vod malchuso l'olam va-ed

a Jewish prayer said in Hebrew, which translates to "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, The Lord is One. Blessed be His glorious Name Whose kingdom is forever and ever.

This is Leo's final line in the show.

Memorial Day is mentioned through the musical.

The Memorial Day referenced is **Confederate Memorial Day** which, during the events of the play, was celebrated in April.

This is not the same holiday as Memorial Day, which we celebrate nationally, in May.

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Encore! Line Up Dance Kid; photo by Joan Marcus

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