

P A Siepmann  
Uppingham School Music Department  
<http://www.petersiepmann.net/teaching>

Upper Fifth Listening



*Songs from Musicals*

5 lessons

LESSON ONE



Upper Fifth Listening: Songs from Musicals

LESSON ONE

**What is a musical?**

- A piece of theatre in which music has a central role.
- The music is usually in a 'popular' style, and uses orchestral or band accompaniment.
- First written in the USA (Broadway, New York) in the early twentieth century.

Musical Theatre through the ages

*Can you guess the chronological order of these four clips?*

[Clip A](#)

[Clip B](#)

[Clip C](#)

[Clip D](#)



Upper Fifth Listening: Songs from Musicals

LESSON ONE

**What is a musical?**

- A piece of theatre in which music has a central role.
- The music is usually in a 'popular' style, and uses orchestral or band accompaniment.
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Musical Theatre through the ages

*Can you guess the chronological order of these four clips?*

Clip A: Cole Porter: Anything Goes (1934)

Clip D: Rodgers & Hammerstein: Oklahoma (1943)

Clip B: Bernstein & Sondheim: West Side Story (1957)

Clip C: Russell: Blood Brothers (1988)

*How did you come to your conclusions? Instrumentation? Harmony? Melody? Rhythm?*



## Types of Song

- Solos, duets and choruses
- Usually separated by spoken dialogue (but sometimes through-composed)
- “Action songs” move the plot forward
- “Character songs” express emotions

- Ballad – slow, romantic, reflective

*<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VEwVAV3VPw4>*

- Comedy songs

*<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pq28qCklEHc>*

- Production numbers

*[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_LzmdovYoAI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_LzmdovYoAI)*

o Full company

o Often opens or closes an act

o Usually shows a change of location or plot

- “Reprise” – when a number is repeated later on in the show



## The History of Musicals 1: The Early Years

- 1920s New York (Tin Pan Alley)
- Irving Berlin, George Gershwin, Jerome Kern, Cole Porter, Richard Rodgers
- Heavy influence of **jazz**
- Famous musicals from this era include
  - o Show Boat (1927) – Jerome Kern <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eh9WayN7R-s>
    - one of the first 'proper' musicals
    - about Mississippi river entertainers
  - o Porgy & Bess (1935) – George Gershwin <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M5o4e5ofRcw>
    - Gershwin combined the jazz influence with an opera-style full symphony orchestra accompaniment and complex, chromatic harmony
    - Deals with the African American life in the 1920s (originally all-black cast)

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5 x 1 hr Lessons

LESSON TWO



**Recap.** – definitions, origins, type of songs, composers, style of early musicals, etc.

**What makes a good song for a musical?**

- 'Catchy' melody – easy to sing along to
  - o “Hook” line

[http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x6w20q\\_catherine-zeta-jones-all-thats-jazz\\_shortfilms](http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x6w20q_catherine-zeta-jones-all-thats-jazz_shortfilms)

- Often mainly diatonic harmony (*can you think of a musical where this is not the case?*)
- Good lyrics/libretto (the libretto is the story of the musical arranged into a singable format)

*Listening Exercise – “Somewhere over the rainbow” worksheet*



## What makes a good song for a musical?

- Simple structure, e.g.,
  - o Intro – verse – chorus – verse – (instrumental interlude) – chorus – outro
  - o Symmetrical 8-bar phrases
  - o Use of a 'middle 8'
    - A 'middle 8' is a contrasting (8 bar) section – it might use new chords and new lyrics – it changes the mood to keep the audience interested!
  - o 32-bar song format (often used for the chorus): **AABA**

*Listening Exercise (Rhinegold)*

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LESSON THREE



**Recap.** – what makes a good song for a musical, 32 bar song format, etc.

## **The History of Musicals 2: Rodgers & Hammerstein**

- The 1940-50s were dominated by the work of Richard **Rodgers** (music) & Oscar **Hammerstein** (libretto)
  - o Oklahoma! (1942)
    - Plot more intricate than earlier musicals
    - Drama, dance and music more 'integrated' than previously
  - o Carousel (1945)
    - Male lead was an anti-hero
  - o Big orchestras now standard
  - o Other hits include South Pacific, The King & I, and The Sound of Music.
  - o Many Rodgers & Hammerstein musicals were made into films.

*<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ewtcfRN0e-A>*

**Listening exercise (Rhinegold 4.24)**



## The History of Musicals 3: 1960-1970s

### - **West Side Story (1957)**

Music by Leonard Bernstein & words by Stephen Sondheim

- Based on Romeo & Juliet, but set in modern New York
- Tragedy, social comment and complex jazzy score are a long way from the early musical comedies!

*<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ra3zyMcTKX4>*

*What do you think were Bernstein's musical influences when writing this number?*

*How would you describe the style of the harmony and the rhythm?*

### - **Stephen Sondheim**

- Went on to write musicals of his own
- One of America's most talented creators of musicals
- A Little Night Music (1973), Company (1970), Sweeney Todd (1979)

*<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mNLPFSLjKEs>*

*What type of song is this?*

*How would you compare Sondheim's style to Bernstein's?*

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LESSON FOUR (short)



## The History of Musicals 4: The Modern Era

### - 'Rock Opera'

- e.g., Hair, Grease, Jesus Christ Superstar
- Nowadays musicals are often based on the work of existing pop singers
  - story-line is created around existing songs
  - *can you think of an example?*

### - The 1980-90s

- Andrew Lloyd Webber
  - Jesus Christ Superstar, Evita, Cats, Sunset Boulevard.
- Willy Russell
  - Blood Brothers

**Listening exercise (Rhinegold 4.23)**

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LESSON FIVE



**CASE STUDY** (Theatre Trip – Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> November)

# **BLOOD BROTHERS**

*by*

**Willy Russell (1983)**

- One of the longest-running musicals in history
- The 1988 West End production is still running after twenty years
- About twins who were separated at birth. One becomes an Oxbridge-graduated councillor and the other unemployed and imprisoned. Both fall in love with the same girl, with tragic consequences.

*[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6fm2cyZ4\\_JU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6fm2cyZ4_JU)*

**Handout** – plot synopsis

**Listening exercises** – see separate sheet