

BROADWAY

Broadway

THE AMERICAN MUSICAL



Broadway: A Mirror of American Life

As **BROADWAY: THE AMERICAN MUSICAL** demonstrates, American musical theater defines our society and is, in turn, defined by it. Music, lyrics, dialogue, and performance are potent cultural indicators on their own; when combined, they provide a colorful portrait of our country. This timeline (compiled by Laurence Maslon, co-author of the companion book *Broadway: The American Musical*) shows how landmark social and political developments throughout the 20th century have been reflected back to us from the Broadway stage.

1893: Immigration

Five-year-old Israel Baline arrives at Ellis Island from the steppes of Russia, one of nearly six million European immigrants to come to New York from 1880-1919. He will change his name to Irving Berlin.

1904: Technology

New York City builds the Interborough Rapid Transit line. The Times Square subway stop is created at 42nd and Broadway; a month later, George M. Cohan makes his solo Broadway debut, singing "Give My Regards to Broadway."

1907: European culture

Franz Lehar's Viennese operetta *The Merry Widow* creates a sensation for imported musicals. Ziegfeld produces the first of his *Follies*.

1910: Assimilation

Jewish comedienne Fanny Brice and African-American performer Bert Williams make their *Follies* debuts on Broadway.

1914: Isolationism

War begins in Europe; imported operettas are spurned by American audiences.

1917-1918: World War I

Irving Berlin produces and writes all-Army revue, *Yip, Yip, Yaphank*. George M. Cohan writes "Over There."

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1919: “Red Summer of 1919”	As unions form all over the country, Broadway actors, musicians and stagehands go on strike; Actors’ Equity is formed.
1920: Prohibition enacted	<i>Ziegfeld Follies of 1919</i> offers several spoofs of Prohibition, including Bert Williams’ number, “You Cannot Make Your Shimmy Shake on Tea.” Sally begins vogue for musicals featuring emancipated women.
1920: Women’s right to vote	<i>Sally</i> begins vogue for musicals featuring emancipated women.
1920-1932: Harlem Renaissance	George Gershwin champions jazz as a vital expression of American life; Sissle and Blake’s <i>Shuffle Along</i> (1921) brings jazz melodies downtown in an all-black musical; <i>Hot Chocolates</i> (1929), another Harlem revue, brings the music of Fats Waller and the performance of Louis Armstrong to Broadway.
1927: Radio	Five of radio’s Top Ten are from Broadway shows; Eddie Cantor interpolates hit radio tune “My Blue Heaven” into <i>Ziegfeld Follies of 1927</i> .
1927: Social awareness	<i>Show Boat</i> by Kern and Hammerstein breaks new ground, putting black and white leading characters on stage together.
1927: The birth of the talkies	Hollywood’s <i>The Jazz Singer</i> , starring Broadway superstar Al Jolson, opens at the Warners’ Theatre.
1929: Stock Market crash	Broadway productions dwindle from 264 in 1927-28 to 187 in 1930-31.
1930: Hollywood	Composers such as the Gershwins, Jerome Kern, Irving Berlin, and Rodgers and Hart go to Hollywood; talent such as Fred Astaire and the Marx Brothers follow. Walter Winchell begins his coast-to-coast radio broadcasts “Your Broadway and Mine.”
1930-1941: The Depression years	<i>Of Thee I Sing</i> (1931), which spoofs the presidency, is first musical to win Pulitzer Prize. “Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?” from <i>New Americana</i> (1932) becomes unofficial anthem of the Depression. Cole Porter’s “Love for Sale” (1930) is banned from the radio for its risqué

	lyrics.
1933: Race relations	With 40 reported cases of lynching that year in the South, Irving Berlin writes the lament “Supper Time” for <i>As Thousands Cheer</i> .
1933-1938: New Deal	WPA creates the Federal Theatre Project (1935-39) to bring theater and entertainment to the masses on the government’s nickel. FDR’s administration is spoofed in Rodgers and Hart’s <i>I’d Rather Be Right</i> (1937).
1937: Labor movement	The Ladies’ Garment Workers Union produces its own political revue, <i>Pins and Needles</i> , performed by members of the union. The pro-labor musical, <i>The Cradle Will Rock</i> , is shut down by Federal Theatre Project producers for its incendiary tone.
1933-1941: War in Europe	German composer Kurt Weill emigrates to NYC; the Gershwins’ <i>Let ‘Em Eat Cake</i> (1933) satirizes fascism in Europe.
1941-1945: World War II	Irving Berlin creates <i>This is the Army</i> (1942), a revue featuring 300 enlisted men; it plays Broadway and tours internationally for three years. <i>Oklahoma!</i> (1943) reaffirms American values. <i>On the Town</i> (1944) portrays three sailors on 24-hour leave in New York City.
1946: Veterans return; African Americans achieve greater status in the workforce	<i>Call Me Mister</i> portrays returning vets. Shows like <i>Carmen Jones</i> , <i>St. Louis Woman</i> and <i>Lost in the Stars</i> give new presence to African-American performers on Broadway.
1948: Television	First guests on Broadway columnist Ed Sullivan TV show, “The Talk of the Town”: Rodgers and Hammerstein. Phil Silvers spoofs “Mr. Television,” Milton Berle, in <i>Top Banana</i> (1951). TV broadcasts of <i>Peter Pan</i> (1955) and <i>Cinderella</i> (1957), created by Broadway talent, receive epic ratings.
1948-1954: Red Scare	<i>The Pajama Game</i> (1954) is a genteel look at labor relations; Jerome Robbins testifies in front of HUAC (1953); Cole Porter’s <i>Silk Stockings</i> (1955) makes fun of Cold War politics.

1954: Rock 'n' roll	Two days after the release of Rosemary Clooney's version of "Hey There" from <i>Pajama Game</i> , Elvis Presley releases his first hit single, <i>That's Alright. Bye Bye Birdie</i> (1960), a spoof of Elvis, is the first musical to incorporate rock and roll.
1956: Urban decline	Gang warfare in Los Angeles and Spanish Harlem inspire creators of <i>West Side Story</i> to set their story among Puerto Rican gangs in white neighborhoods.
1960-1963: JFK	Irving Berlin's <i>Mr. President</i> (1962) features Kennedy-esque family; a week after Kennedy's assassination, Jacqueline Kennedy tells <i>Life</i> that her husband was inspired by musical <i>Camelot</i> .
1955-1964: Civil rights movement	<i>Golden Boy</i> (1964) stars Sammy Davis as a black boxer rebelling against prejudice. <i>Cabaret</i> (1966) boldly deals with rise of anti-Semitism in Hitler's Germany.
1967: Counter-culture	<i>Fiddler on the Roof</i> (1964) taps into the era's tensions around the "generation gap." <i>Hair</i> (1968) captures the youth movement of the 1960s with a rock score, hippie cast, nudity, and anarchic tone.
1964-1973: Vietnam War	<i>Hair</i> features several anti-war moments, including draft-card burnings. <i>1776</i> , a musical about the Declaration of Independence, is invited to perform at the Nixon White House in 1970 under the proviso that one of its anti-war numbers is dropped; the producer refuses and the show is eventually performed intact.
1970: Sexual revolution	Stephen Sondheim's <i>Company</i> (1970) deals with open marriages in "swinging" Manhattan.
1973-1975: Watergate	Bob Fosse's <i>Chicago</i> (1975) holds a vicious mirror up to political corruption in the judicial system.
1976: Bicentennial	Alan Jay Lerner and Leonard Bernstein's only collaboration, <i>1600 Pennsylvania Avenue</i> , celebrates the American presidency. In <i>Pacific Overtures</i> , Sondheim and Harold Prince critique American imperialism in Japan.

1970-1978: Black arts movement	Several black musicals find favor and success on Broadway: <i>The Wiz</i> , <i>Ain't Misbehavin'</i> , <i>Sophisticated Ladies</i> .
1983-present: AIDS crisis	<i>La Cage aux Folles</i> (1983) puts a gay romance center stage while the AIDS epidemic spreads across the country, deeply affecting the Broadway community.
1985-1990: Globalization	British producer Cameron Mackintosh offers such shows as <i>Cats</i> , <i>Les Miserables</i> and <i>Phantom of the Opera</i> first in England, then New York City, and eventually all over the world.
1991: Cultural diversity	Actors' Equity, on behalf of its Asian-American members, protests British actor Jonathan Pryce playing Eurasian character in <i>Miss Saigon</i> .
1994-1997: Urban renewal	The New Amsterdam Theatre is resurrected, triggering a major overhaul of 42 nd Street. Following Disney's success with stage versions of <i>Beauty and the Beast</i> (1994) and <i>The Lion King</i> (1997), other corporations invest in Broadway musicals.
1997: Celebrity culture	When <i>Chicago</i> returns to Broadway in a revival, critics mention its striking relevance to celebrity culture, Court TV, and the O.J. Simpson trial.
2001: 9/11	Terrorist attacks devastate Manhattan and Broadway shows close for an unprecedented two days. Pure musical comedies like <i>The Producers</i> and <i>Hairspray</i> bring entertainment relief to audiences.
2004: Presidential election	Republican National Convention convenes in NYC; <i>Wonderful Town</i> and <i>Phantom of the Opera</i> appear on official lists for delegates' tickets.