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JUST A NUMBER:
A CABARET EXPLORING THE ROLES MY AGE PREVENTS ME FROM PLAYING

by

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B.F.A. University of Central Florida, 2011

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts (Musical Theatre)
in the Department of Theatre
in the College of Arts and Humanities
at the University of Central Florida
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Major Professor: Earl Weaver

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ABSTRACT

Learning your type in the entertainment industry is not an easy lesson for many young performers. This is especially true if you are already being cast as the ‘older woman’ or ‘witty sidekick’ at 13 years old. A wise professor once told me, at the ripe age of 20, that moving to New York City after graduating with my Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Musical Theatre would be a mistake. He told me that as a character actress my time will come and that I am too young to play the roles I am right for. These words were not easy to hear and took time to accept, but it helped me shape my future. Knowing I had time to spare before pursuing a professional career as a performer, I have been teaching theatre in middle and high school to inspire other students to refine their craft and continue their own path to a career in the theatre industry. I also got married and started a family, so by the time I am ready to pursue a career as a professional actress, my children will be older and more independent and not need mommy around 100% of the time. This also gives me plenty of time to research and continue to perform (as my teaching schedule allows) for when that time comes. It occurred to me I should explore those mature women roles and create a one-person cabaret titled *Just a Number: A Cabaret Exploring the Roles My Age Prevents Me From Playing*.

I wanted to explore and develop performance roles I will age into. This cabaret allowed me the opportunity to explore those roles, but also how my life has and will continue to prepare me to play these strong characters. Most of the characters have gone through major life experiences. By the time I am at the right age to tackle those roles professionally, I will have already experienced marriage, motherhood, loss of loved ones, moving jobs and homes, and who knows what else! Those experiences will allow me to bring more life and authenticity to the roles

that this cabaret featured. I also took a moment to reflect on my career as a young performer who was not the right type for roles I was up for. This was a tough reality to accept as a young performer, and I came to terms with that truth; taking a moment to poke fun at that time in my career added some levity to a potentially heavy subject that many actors must face.

For the material, I looked at the works of major musical theatre composers and lyricists whose material features strong female characters of a certain age. I incorporated songs that chronicle the life of a character actress and highlight major life events that someone my age needs to go through to truly understand what the character has experienced.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER TWO: HISTORICAL RESEARCH	4
Type and Branding	4
How the Industry Views Actresses of My Type	7
Well-Known Actresses of My Type.....	11
CHAPTER THREE: SCRIPT AND SCORE ANALYSIS	16
Song Selection.....	16
Songs in Context of the Musical	18
Songs in Context of the Cabaret.....	37
CHAPTER FOUR: THE PROCESS	42
Ideas for Cabaret	42
Writing Process	44
Rehearsal Process	49
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION.....	53
LIST OF REFERENCES	55

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Learning your type in the entertainment industry is not an easy lesson for any young performer. Especially if you are already being cast as the ‘older woman’ or ‘witty sidekick’ at 13 years old. This happened for me all throughout my formative years. I recall one particular instance in high school when this harsh reality hit. It was the summer before my senior year of high school. Our theatre department was producing *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* that Fall and all I wanted was to play Rosemary. I had never played the love interest or leading lady, and it was my last year of high school, so I felt I had earned it and knew I could sing the role. I met with my high school theatre teacher, Melody Herzfeld, and told her I was auditioning for Rosemary. She very bluntly said, “You are going to be Smitty.” I was heartbroken, but she was adamant on having me cast as (once again!) the witty sidekick. Regardless of her preconceived casting choices, I came to the auditions in an outfit that resembled Rosemary and even sang a cut of her solo “Happy to Keep His Dinner Warm.” I didn’t even get a callback for Rosemary and was, of course, cast as Smitty. It was bittersweet though. I didn’t get the role I really wanted, but knew I’d have a blast playing a role I was truly right for. This performance got great reviews and led to a South Florida Cappie Award, which recognizes excellence in high school theatre, for Featured Actress in a Musical. This was one of my first lessons in type in the theatre industry that started my journey into finding out who I am as a performer, owning it, and making it into a successful career.

When I got to college, I was faced with a similar lesson. A wise professor once told me, at the ripe age of 20, that moving to New York City after graduating with my Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Musical Theatre would be a mistake. While my classmates were all making their

way in the theatre industry, he told me that as a character actress my time will come and that I am too young to play the roles I am right for. These words were not easy to hear and took time to accept, but it helped me shape my future. Knowing that I had time to spare before pursuing a professional career as a performer, I began teaching theatre in middle and high school to inspire other students to refine their craft and continue their own path to a career in the theatre industry. During this time, I also got married and started a family, so by the time I was ready to pursue a career as a professional actress, my children will be older and more independent and not need mommy around 100% of the time. This also gives me plenty of time to research and continue to perform (as my teaching schedule allows) for when that time comes. This is where I came up with the plan for my thesis: *Just a Number: A Cabaret Exploring the Roles My Age Prevents From Playing*.

I have already been lucky to play several roles (albeit in educational and community theatres,) that I am way too young for. As a performer, I want to continue to learn and explore roles that I will age into. This cabaret not only will allow me to explore those roles, but also how my life has and will continue to prepare me to play these strong characters of a certain age. Most of the characters, whose material I plan to include, have gone through major life experiences. When the time comes for me to tackle those roles professionally, I will have already experienced marriage, motherhood, loss of loved ones, moving jobs and homes, and who knows what else! Those experiences allowed me to bring more life and authenticity to the roles that this cabaret featured. I also want to take a moment to share some of the roles that I *am* the right age for but could never play based on my type. This was a tough reality to accept as a young performer, and

I have now come to terms with that truth, so taking a moment to poke fun at those characters will add some levity to a potentially heavy subject that many actors must face.

For the material, I looked at the works of Rodgers & Hammerstein, Jule Styne, Stephen Sondheim, Jerry Herman, and others whose material features strong female characters of a certain age. I incorporated songs by these composers and lyricists, sung by similar characters, that chronicled the life of a character actress and highlight major life events that someone my age might need to go through to truly understand what the character has experienced. I will include a live accompanist in the performance and a small team of crew members, made up of my technical production students. I plan to perform this cabaret as a one night only event in South Florida as a fund raiser for my high school's theatre department. This project gave me the opportunity to explore performance material right for me while giving back to the student who benefit from what this process has taught me.

CHAPTER TWO: HISTORICAL RESEARCH

Throughout the history of American Musical Theatre, the roles available for character actresses have appeared along a broad spectrum. From as early as Aunt Eller in 1943's *Oklahoma!* to Dee Dee Allen in 2018's *The Prom*, Broadway has embraced bawdy and belty women roles, giving character actresses a time to shine. The assortment of character roles we see throughout Broadway history can cover many different skill-sets for the actresses who play those roles. There are character roles that require dancing skills, like Bonnie in *Anything Goes* (1934) or Lila Dixon in *Holiday Inn* (2016), and other roles with little-to-no movement requirements like Miss Hannigan in *Annie* (1977) and Madame Thenardier in *Les Miserables* (1987). In this chapter, I explore how my type as an actress and my brand can influence the roles I may be considered for and play onstage.

Type and Branding

Ever since I was a young performer in theatre camps, I was cast in the older women roles. Some of my early work included Jack's Mother in *Into the Woods*, Madame Thenardier in *Les Miserables*, and Mama Morton in *Chicago*. This continued in high school, and as I transitioned into my collegiate professional work, I was still seen by casting directors as older than I was. In my junior year of college, I took an Acting Studio class and our professor had us go into the community and survey 100 strangers and ask three questions without explanation: How old am I, what is my ethnicity, and what is my job? Only after getting their feedback would we be allowed to share our actual answers. This professor wanted to make sure that as we were getting ready to head out into the real world, we would be knowledgeable in the types of roles and characters we

would be seen as. By completing this assignment, we'd have an idea of how to brand ourselves based off how the general public would perceive us and what roles we should be looking to audition for. I was 21 when I completed this survey; I am of Polish and Russian descent; and I am a musical theatre performer. My results, however, were as follows: age range 26-32, English ethnicity, and thought to be either a teacher or nurse.

While in my second year of grad-school, I took a Musical Theatre Voice II class which took the topic of type to a new level. In this course, we were asked to complete a similar survey and use its findings to create a two-word character type description that speaks to us more on a spiritual level. This would not necessarily focus on our physical form, but who we are as performers. The range of answers I got for "How old am I?" as a 30-something year old were much closer to the age I was at that time; ranging from 28-38. One of the questions asked this time around was "What time period would you put me in?" I assumed most of the answers would be modern day, but surprisingly many were 1970's. After asking those and some other questions, I brought my results to class. Once there, our fellow master's degree candidates chimed in with their opinions. My classmates had already known me for a year (or more) so their thoughts, along with the results of my surveying, led to creating my final two-word character type description: genial gumption. I was happy to hear they thought of me as friendly and with spirited initiative and resourcefulness.

In Jonathan Flom's "Act Like It's Your Business", he stresses the importance of branding and knowing who you are as a performer to further yourself in the theatre industry. He explains that finding out (and accepting) your type "can be incredibly empowering and it can help guide all of your decision making" as you select material perform and roles to audition for (9). While

exploring material and roles, he suggests creating a list of role models that you can compare yourself to, both in vocal and physical type. Not only can you make a list of other performers of your type, but even one of dream roles to aspire to. Mr. Flom instructs his readers to be broad, “but also think realistically” (23). When comprising my list of potential songs, I started by using this process to find the material sung by dream roles of mine, but also faced facts that as I’ve developed as an actress, some of those roles originally on my list may not be a true fit for who I am, or can be preserved as on stage.

Neil Rutherford, a world-wide casting directing and author of “Musical Theatre Auditions and Casting”, makes it clear that when a performer doesn’t know their type, it “suggests a severe lack of understanding” (49). This initial knowledge of one’s type can be evident in the roles they choose to audition for, as well as in the material they select to perform at those auditions:

Your preparation and the subsequent in-depth homework you achieve with your songbook goes a long way to getting you through to the callback stage. If you make a poor choice, no matter how good your talent, you risk being rejected at the first hurdle.

And the more time you spend finding your material, and the more versatile it is, the more useful that song will be to you. (66)

When discussing what makes a good audition song, he explains that not only should the song be appropriate for the character you’re auditioning for, but for you as an actor. He cautions performers of “descriptive lyrics that go against your physical type” (87). While it requires a more in-depth knowledge of the show, there is one particular example in the musical *Hairspray*

that comes to mind. While Tracy Turnblad is required to appear onstage as an overweight teenager, there is also a height requirement of the role expressly stated in the lyrics of one of the show's musical numbers, "(The Legend of) Miss Baltimore Crabs". As sung by Velma Von Tussle, "And so, my dear, so short and stout...", hinting that Tracy must be shorter than the rest of the cast members on stage (Meehan). Some production companies even list a height maximum for any actresses auditioning for that role. In an open call on Backstage.com for Royal Caribbean Cruise Line's production of *Hairspray*, the character breakdowns states that actresses auditioning for Tracy must be "Caucasian, 5' 5" or shorter, to play high school age" (Saab). Even though this limits the opportunity to play this role to shorter actresses, it also helps the casting team save time, so long as no taller actresses show up who didn't read the casting notice or did their research on the show prior to attending the audition.

How the Industry Views Actresses of My Type

One of the most valuable findings in my research was to look into the other actresses of my type and how they fit into an industry that relies heavily on physical appearance. Finding one would lead me down a rabbit hole of potential roles I would be well-suited for. It was fun to see how many of those characters and shows I was familiar with. I knew many of them, thanks to the wonderful musical theatre history training I received during my undergraduate studies. However, it led to others that I was not as familiar with and got me to look into other potential material for my cabaret. For example, I had heard of the musical *Big* but never familiarized myself with the score. I realized that there is a wonderful song "Stop, Time" that Mrs. Baskin, the mother of the lead character, sings in hopes of her son staying young forever to treasure the time they have

together while he is a child. While I couldn't find a perfect fit for that song in my cabaret, it opened my eyes to another role I can now hope to one day play.

With all the good I uncovered from my studies, I also was faced with the stereotypes of curvier female performers and how the industry views those actresses who do not fit their ideal image of the characters they are cast as. *Female Bodies on the American Stage: Enter Fat Actress*, by Jennifer-Scott Mobley, explores the role of the "fat actress" in the theatre industry and how they are seen through different lenses (the director, the costume designer, the choreographer, etc.) While no other actress is exactly like me, some of those actresses with whom I share physical similarities with and the roles they made famous are praised for their successes in a business where your look can often get you hired or fired. Actresses like Rosie O'Donnell, Kathy Bates, or Camryn Manheim are brought up in the chapter that focuses on the unruliness often associated with the "fat actress". All of these actresses have been praised for their work on stage or film/television, but when they use their popularity to voice their opinions on matters important to them, they are shunned and looked down upon for being hostile. Mobley poses the question: "Is it possible that the same behavior from a slender woman would not be interpreted as disruptive?" (147). Why is it that when a more voluptuous actress speaks up for themselves, they are seen as aggressive, but when a thinner actress speaks up for themselves, they are praised for voicing their opinions? Unfortunately, society's view can be skewed when comparing the body types of performers in the theatre industry and in today's world of social media, these issues are brought into the public eye with the click of a button.

Luckily, the theatre world is one of big voices, and when one of their own needs support, the rest of them speak up on their behalf. In the 2018 Off-Broadway revival of *Smokey Joe's*

Café, Broadway veteran Alysha Umphress was singled out for her size by a New York Times critic who says Ms. Umphress “is bigger than the other women onstage”. The reviewer, Laura Collins-Hughes, also calls out the costume designer, Alejo Vietti, for not knowing “how to work with that, dressing her in an unnecessarily unflattering way.” On the contrary though, Collins-Hughes praises Mr. Vietti in his design created for his work worn by a thinner actress, claiming he does better with “the skimpy, yet not overly revealing, pink fringe outfit Emma Degerstedt wears, and jiggles in.”

Alysha Umphress took to Twitter to voice her thoughts on this hurtful message, claiming “It was full on mean girl. It’s 2018. We should be celebrating women’s diversity in the arts, not shaming them.” Soon after Ms. Umphress’s post, Twitter went wild with support from the Broadway community. Other alumni of the New York stage made it clear that Ms. Collins-Hughes needed to, as tweeted by Caissie Levy, “Critique the work, not the person”. Even the *Smokey Joe’s Cafe* social media account spoke out in support:

We are so proud to have four strong, fierce, diverse women in our *Smokey Joe’s* family. Alysha, Emma, Dionne, and Nicole wow us onstage every night, and we celebrate each of them and their spectacular talents.

Laura Collins-Hughes tried to make up for her poorly worded critique by sending out a Tweet that put the blame more on the designer than the actress:

It is in no way shameful to be big, let alone bigger than the other women onstage. My remark about the costuming reflects on the designer. This is not the first time I’ve noticed a designer seemingly at a loss about how to dress a larger woman well. My issue was

with a particular costume. It was on a human body. I said nothing negative about anyone's body.

Regardless of her attempt at an apology, shots were fired and make it clear that one actresses body type affected the designer's choices. Woman with curvier body types are already at a disadvantage when going shopping for clothes and now we have to worry about what we look like in clothing custom made to our exact measurements. With how challenging it is to get into the entertainment industry, which may be the only one that can get away with hiring or firing someone for their appearance, this is one worry that a more voluptuous actress should not need to worry about. (Wong)

On screen, actresses often are not even playing their age. It is the common practice in the film industry to cast actresses in roles that are younger than their actual age. For example: Angelina Jolie was 28 years old when playing the mother of Colin Farrell, then 27, in the 2004 film *Alexander*, Anne Bancroft, as the predatory Mrs. Robinson, was only 6 years older than Dustin Hoffman in 1967's *The Graduate*, and, possibly even more absurd, actress Hope Davis was asked to play Johnny Depp's mother in a movie — even though she is a year younger than he is! When asked to comment, David said “That tells you something about the absurdity of this industry and the whole age thing...Of course I turned the role down.” (Cohen) In comparison with the film and television industry, Patricia Cohen of *The New York Times* says that “on Broadway at least, women can still be rock stars.” In fact, within the last ten years, the roles available for actresses have increased on the New York stage, especially for women of a certain age. Ms. Cohen interviewed actress of stage and screen, Susan Sarandon, in her article “Forget the Ingénues; Cue the Grown-Ups” who agrees that “theater is a much more forgiving medium.”

Theatre does not require close-ups on camera and, pending on the lighting and make up design, an actress can lose or gain 20 years. The article also includes excerpts from an interview with actress Barbara Walter, who supports older women playing older roles:

‘...to carry the audience with you all through an evening, it’s recognized that you need a certain developed technique and experience. That isn’t something you can just get up and do.’ The stage requires a kind of ‘mental agility.’ She said, an ‘awareness of the whole arc of the evening, and you’re in charge.’ (Cohen)

Well-Known Actresses of My Type

Since the start of the entertainment industry, many actresses have worked their way up fame’s ladder to find great success. These actresses come in all shapes and sizes, but for those playing bawdy and dominating characters, they may have had a more challenging journey to victory. The way the press presents those performers can often skew how the public views them as professionals in their field. Luckily for many who have risen to fame over the years, their fan base has stood by them, regardless of what the press has to say about their idols.

One of theatre’s most celebrated and outspoken actresses of the last 40 years is Patti LuPone. With two Tony Awards for Lead Actress in a Musical, for her portrayal of Eva Peron in *Evita* and Rose in *Gypsy*, LuPone is well-respected and often revered by others in her industry. However, she is a brassy and opinionated woman who isn’t afraid to use her platform to speak her mind. She has been known to take phones out of the hands of audience members at shows and call out theatre patrons mid-show for using their devices during performances (a practice that many theatre enthusiasts refer to as being “LuPoned”). Further proving her assertiveness,

LuPone has even been quoted putting down the Broadway legend Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber: “He’s a jerk. He’s a sad sack. He is the definition of sad sack” (Marchese). When she first listened to the *Evita* concept recording, she thought “Ow, my ear” and even said “What the hell is this song about?” in regard to the song that became her anthem “Don’t Cry for Me, Argentina” (Marchese). While her brutal honesty sometimes gets her in trouble in the press, her talent always shines through. Michael Muckian of the *Wisconsin Gazette* agrees that while she has been viewed as “exacting and demanding...LuPone is one diva who inevitably delivers.” (Muckian).

Similarly, one of Broadway’s brightest stars of the Golden Age, Ethel Merman, held the diva title, but without the often-associated attitude that LuPone boasts. Rather, she knew her talent was of value, but she never crossed the line between confident and cocky. Merman, known as the First Lady of American Musical Theatre, had a self-taught talent onstage, but offstage “had a reputation for tolerating no B.S. She rarely missed performances, could let out a string of expletives like a pro, and rarely held back what was on her mind.” (Upperco) Her career skyrocketed during the Golden Age of Broadway and it gave her the ammunition to give input on her most iconic star-vehicle role as *Gypsy*’s original Mama Rose. When approached by producer David Merrick to play the ultimate stage-mother, she was told newcomer (at the time,) Stephen Sondheim, would be both composer and lyricist. Without any major successes as a composer on his Broadway resume at the time (having wrote the lyrics for *West Side Story* with Leonard Bernstein as composer), Merman refused that offer unless a more well-known composer was hired to score the show, resulting in hiring Jule Styne. While this story may leave Ethel Merman sounding like a demanding diva, she was only looking out for herself in a role that she would end

up synonymous with. Over her 40-year career onstage, Ms. Merman became a legend of the Great White Way, and though it may seem like an understatement to most theatre enthusiasts, she has humbly stated that “Broadway has been very good to me. But then, I’ve been very good to Broadway.” (Upperco)

While LuPone and Merman have made a name for themselves, both onstage and through their notorious attitudes and actions, not all belty, bawdy Broadway actresses have that type of a reputation. A more contemporary actress of my type is Lisa Howard, who made her Broadway debut in 2005’s *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* as Rona Lisa Peretti, a role I have already had the opportunity to play. She has been in five other Broadway shows, has numerous regional and touring credits, and appeared in the mega-hit film *The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn- Part 2*. While Howard is known in the theatre community for her soaring vocals, when not appearing onstage she continues to make a living as a plus-size model. In Jeryl Brunner’s Forbes article, ‘This is Me,’ Broadway Star Lisa Howard Is Proud Of Her Curves, Howard celebrates her body by playing characters who embrace their body and learn to love themselves for who they are. In the article, Howard says, “I can’t let other people’s words discourage me. When I hear someone’s opinion, I can take it in, but ultimately, I do what I want.” (Brunner) As a curvier actress, I am thrilled to see another woman of a similar physical type as proud of who she is and as successful as Howard.

Howard is praised within the Broadway world for her confidence and, unlike LuPone and Merman, has seen little public ridicule. I was lucky enough to participate in a workshop with Howard at the Florida Association of Theatre Education 2019 Conference titled “Musical Theatre and the Artistry of the Business.” At this workshop, Howard spoke about the industry

and how to be successful and how to teach others to accept who they are so they may find their own success. She was just as lovely as I'd hoped, and meeting one of my role models in the theatre community was so inspiring. Not only do I think Lisa Howard is great, but Robert Viagas, of Playbill.com commends Howard in his article, "The Glorious, Surprising and Weirdest Moments of the 2015 Tony Awards." He states that Howard, who was "not-even-nominated," performed a "slamming rendition" of her show-stopping number, "Jenny's Blues" from that year's *It Shoulda Been You*. Also celebrated in *Rolling Stone*, Howard's performance at that year's Tony's was considered a highlight of the night:

The MVP: Lisa Howard, who belted the pants off of a song from wedding comedy *It Shoulda Been You*. Howard...commanded the room with "Jenny's Blues," the evening's only real 11 o'clock number. Keep an eye on this actress' star; after last night, it'll definitely be rising. (Plitt and Scherer)

After seeing that performance, it was clear the Tony Awards committee missed the opportunity to honor Howard with a nomination. (*Lisa Howard - Actress Singer Model*)

Fame does not necessarily define success. There are many actresses in the theatre community who have found success at the regional level or in touring companies. Actress Allison Guinn, who most recently appeared in the national tour of *Les Miserables* as Madame Thenardier, is not a house-hold name, but she has appeared in productions on Broadway, regionally, and internationally. She always has considered herself a character actor and, by accepting her type, found it easier to build her career. Now that she is starting to age into her type, she's finding more success. Guinn says:

I am just now getting into that 'certain age' but I was born a character actor! I wasn't an ingenue first. I imagine that transition is harder. For me, to reach middle age is actually a character actor's prime casting range so I'm really excited! (Kushner)

For Guinn, she feels the theatre community is very accepting of character actors of a certain age: "I also think the theater industry is in particular is MORE KIND than say, the film industry! We're celebrated, venerated!" Hearing these words leave me very optimistic about my potential career path. As a big, bawdy, and belty character actress, I have an accepting community and range of roles to age into. (Kushner)

CHAPTER THREE: SCRIPT AND SCORE ANALYSIS

Song Selection

Just A Number: A Cabaret Exploring the Roles My Age Prevents Me From Playing includes thirteen songs, each of which focuses on a different aspect of my life as a character actress who is too young to get hired for the roles I am appropriate to play. Some of the lyrics are parodied to suit my story, but, for the most part, they will be performed as written.

“It’s Today” (*Mame*)

“Shy” (*Once Upon a Mattress*)

“The Wizard and I” (*Wicked*)

“Bali Hai” (*South Pacific*)

“Little Girls” (*Annie*)

“Poor Unfortunate Souls” (*The Little Mermaid*)

“As We Stumble Along” (*The Drowsy Chaperone*)

“So In Love” (*Kiss Me, Kate*)

“Our Children” (*Ragtime*)

“No One is Alone” into “Children Will Listen” (*Into the Woods*)

“If He Walked Into My Life” (*Mame*)

“Before the Parade Passes By” (*Hello, Dolly!*)

“Everything’s Coming Up Roses” (*Gypsy*)

An article from the *Journal for Voice* called “Trends in Musical Theatre Voice: An Analysis of Audition Requirements for Singers” by Kathryn Green, et al, explores the styles

required of musical theatre actresses during the 2012-2013 Broadway season. I used that article to explore the trends of vocal qualities used in the songs included in my cabaret. According to the findings of this article, 40% of Broadway job postings for female performers required a Traditional Musical Theatre vocal style with either a legit or belt quality. My particular abilities focus more on the belted quality, which requires a chest-dominant vocal production. Some of the popular characters listed that fit this style “included Bloody Mary in *South Pacific*, Dolly Levi in *Hello, Dolly!*, and Velma Kelly in *Chicago*” (325). Coincidentally, the first two of those three characters’ songs are featured in my cabaret. Traditional Musical Theatre had the highest percentage of any other vocal style, followed closely by Contemporary Musical Theatre at 30% (like *Wicked*—also included in my cabaret), Pop/Rock at 25% (which most jukebox musical would be categorized as), and Legit at 5% (à la *The Phantom of the Opera*).

Based on the four vocal qualities discussed in that article, the majority of songs in my show are Traditional Musical Theatre, but not all are in the belting style. Those songs that are include: “Some People” (*Gypsy*), “Shy” (*Once Upon a Mattress*), “Bali Hai” (*South Pacific*), “If He Walked Into My Life” (*Mame*), “Before the Parade Passes By” (*Hello, Dolly!*), and “Everything’s Coming Up Roses” (*Gypsy*). “So In Love” (*Kiss Me, Kate*) would be the only Traditional Musical Theatre legit song in the cabaret. The other songs, “The Wizard and I” (*Wicked*), “Little Girls” (*Annie*), “Poor Unfortunate Souls” (*The Little Mermaid*), “As We Stumble Along” (*The Drowsy Chaperone*), “Our Children” (*Ragtime*), and “No One is Alone” into “Children Will Listen” (*Into the Woods*), would be classified as Contemporary Musical Theatre with varying degrees of belt and legit vocal qualities.

Songs in Context of the Musical

Title of the Song: “It’s Today”

Name of the musical: *Mame*

Name of the Composer: Jerry Herman

Name of the Lyricist: Jerry Herman

Year of Original Broadway Production: 1966

Name of Role: Mame Dennis

Name of Original Performer: Angela Lansbury

Notable Broadway Revivals: N/A

Brief Synopsis of the Show’s Plot:

Orphaned at ten, Patrick Dennis’ life has undergone drastic change when he travels from Des Moines, Iowa, all the way to New York City to live with his Auntie Mame. His nanny, anxious Agnes Gooch, leads him to expect a dear grey-haired old aunt baking a cherry pie. But instead, Agnes and Patrick wander into a wild party, a raging prohibition-era shindig starring the fantastic, flamboyant, eccentric, charismatic, one-and-only Mame Dennis. Auntie Mame, shocked but delighted to find herself in the role of a guardian, buys Patrick every toy imaginable, shows him the town from high life to low back streets, teaches him how to mix a martini, and showers him with love. After Patrick’s trustees take him away to a conservative boarding school, and the stock market crash leaves her penniless, fearless Mame tries to keep caring for her nephew, even as she reinvents herself: from party girl to working girl, Southern belle, world traveler, wealthy widow, and literary autobiographer. When grown-up Patrick brings home his WASP-y debutante girlfriend, and introduces Mame to his world of preppy prejudice, Mame

finds the one culture in which she cannot make herself at home, and fears that she has lost her nephew to the Knickerbocker Bank. But with a little help from a pretty interior decorator, a very pregnant Agnes, and the wildly diverse crowd of her dearest friends, Mame wins the battle for Patrick's soul. Featuring one of the most dynamic and lovable heroines of the Broadway stage, *Mame* is a wildly optimistic --and just plain wild-- ode to a colorful, unconventional, well-lived life. Jerry Herman's famous score includes the poignant pathos of "If He Walked Into My Life," the catty duet "Bosom Buddies," and the life-is-a-banquet vigor of "Open a New Window." (Stage Agent)

Brief Character Analysis- Mame Dennis:

A glamorous and eccentric woman who takes her nephew, Patrick, into her care after his father has passed away. Mame has a bohemian and opulent lifestyle in which she hosts frequent parties in her Manhattan apartment, goes on lengthy trips, and has an expensive taste for fashion.

Vocal type: Mezzo-Soprano with Belt (Ritter and Hopkins)

Brief Song Analysis:

"It's Today" introduces the audience to Mame Dennis. The song appears towards the start of the show and brings us into Mame's eccentric and elegant lifestyle. The scene takes place during one of Mame's many socialite parties. By the time the musical number is over, we see her accepting her nephew, Patrick, into her life and excited to see where things go.

Title of the Song: "Shy"

Name of the musical: *Once Upon a Mattress*

Name of the Composer: Mary Rodgers

Name of the Lyricist: Marshall Barer

Year of Original Broadway Production: 1959

Name of Role: Princess Winnifred

Name of Original Performer: Carol Burnett

Notable Broadway Revivals: 1997 (Sarah Jessica Parker)

Brief Synopsis of the Show's Plot:

Our story begins in a faraway kingdom long ago. Due to an unhappy curse, King Sextimus is unable to speak. Meanwhile, his terror-of-a-wife, Queen Aggravain, has taken over control of the kingdom. Most importantly, in an attempt to keep Prince Dauntless single, she has decreed that only the princess who can pass her test may marry her son. Further, no one else in the kingdom may marry until Prince Dauntless does. Lady Larken and Sir Harry are extremely disturbed by this fact since Lady Larken is now pregnant with Sir Harry's baby. Luckily, Sir Harry is able to find an amazing princess, Winnifred the Woebegone. She instantly catches the attention of Prince Dauntless, and, in the end, is able to pass the Queen's supposedly impassable sensitivity test. When the Queen tries to prevent the Prince Dauntless from marrying, he tells her to 'shut up', which ends up breaking the curse on the king. Now able to speak, King Sextimus regains his rightful position as leader of the kingdom, and all is well. (Stage Agent)

Brief Character Analysis- Princess Winnifred:

A non-traditional leading lady, Princess Winnifred is a strong character (both mentally and physically), but we see her softer side a few times throughout. She is proud of her Kingdom of the Swamps and her nickname "Fred". She appears a bit rough around the edges but can be more lady-like if she needs to.

Vocal type: Mezzo-Soprano with Belt

Brief Song Analysis:

“Shy” is the musical number that introduces Princess Winnifred’s character. It appears in the third scene of the show, after Winnifred arrives at the kingdom in hopes of winning the heart of Prince Dauntless. Throughout the number, she claims to be shy; however, she is loud and boisterous, completely going against what the lyrics may suggest. This adds to the comedy of the song and allows Winnifred to become a favorite in the kingdom.

Title of the Song: “The Wizard and I”

Name of the musical: *Wicked*

Name of the Composer: Stephen Schwartz

Name of the Lyricist: Stephen Schwartz

Year of Original Broadway Production: 2003

Name of Role: Madame Morrible

Name of Original Performer: Carole Shelley

Notable Broadway Revivals: N/A

Brief Synopsis of the Show’s Plot:

Stephen Schwartz’s *Wicked: The Untold Story of the Witches of Oz* takes place before L. Frank Baum’s classic *Wizard of Oz* story ever began. Before Dorothy was even alive, two young girls met in the Land of Oz, became rivals, and then friends. One was born with emerald green skin, with a brilliant mind and a fiery spirit. The other was classically beautiful, with great ambition and incredible drive. The green-skinned Elphaba was ostracized by her family and everyone at

school. The beautiful Galinda was destined to be forever popular. Over the course of *Wicked*, we discover how these two young women became rivals and then the closest of friends – and how they ended up as the Wicked Witch of the West and Glinda the Good. (Stage Agent)

Brief Character Analysis- Madame Morrible:

A sorcery professor at Shiz University. Upon discovering the mystical talents her newest pupil, Elphaba, possesses, Madame Morrible informs the Wizard and claims that by teaming up with him, Elphaba could help the citizens of Oz. In reality, her magic is misused to silence the animals in the city.

Vocal type: Alto

Brief Song Analysis:

“The Wizard and I”, which is often performed as a solo (cutting out Madame Morrible’s opening verse) starts with Madame Morrible informing Elphaba that she had waited years to get a student with natural, yet magical, gifts. She reassures Elphaba that her talents are appreciated and something to be proud of. She then expresses that the Wizard of Oz may be interested in having Elphaba as an assistant to help him in the Emerald City, so long as she uses her talents for good. Madame Morrible then exits and Elphaba sings the remainder of the number, excited that her skills may actually be what leads to her success, regardless of her green skin.

Title of the Song: “Bali Hai”

Name of the musical: *South Pacific*

Name of the Composer: Richard Rodgers

Name of the Lyricist: Oscar Hammerstein II

Year of Original Broadway Production: 1949

Name of Role: Bloody Mary

Name of Original Performer: Juanita Hall

Notable Broadway Revivals: 2008 (Loretta Ables Sayre)

Brief Synopsis of the Show's Plot:

Set against the dramatic background of an idyllic South Pacific island during WWII, Rodgers and Hammerstein's *South Pacific* intertwines the themes of romance, duty, and prejudice to create a story that is all at once hilarious, heartbreaking, and thought-provoking. Based on the anecdotes of a real-life U.S. Navy commander who was stationed on an island, the musical follows two intercultural love stories: Nellie, a spunky nurse from Arkansas, falls in love with Emile, a French plantation owner on the island who has two children from his late Polynesian wife; at the same time, U.S. Lieutenant Cable falls for a beautiful island native named Liat. Both Americans find themselves struggling to reconcile their own cultural prejudices with their amorous feelings, all the while under the dark cloud of a war that is coming ever closer to their island paradise. (Stage Agent)

Brief Character Analysis- Bloody Mary:

A Tonkinese island trader. She was brought to the island by a French planter and sells and trades with the American Seabees during World War II. She speaks broken English and has a daughter, Liat, of whom she is very protective. She hopes to convince a sailor (of high rank) to meet and fall in love with Liat, so that Liat can return to the United States with her betrothed and live a long and healthy life.

Vocal type: Alto

Brief Song Analysis:

Appearing about one-third of the way through Act I, “Bali Hai” is a persuasive ballad sung by the beloved Bloody Mary. Bloody Mary sings of this mysterious island, that can bring happiness to the marines who are miserable while stationed in the South Pacific during the war. She sings to convince Lieutenant Cable to visit the island in hopes that he will fall in love with her daughter, Liat. By the end of the number, all the Seabees are hypnotized by her song and longing to visit Bali Hai.

Title of the Song: “Little Girls”**Name of the musical:** *Annie***Name of the Composer:** Charles Strouse**Name of the Lyricist:** Martin Charmin**Year of Original Broadway Production:** 1977**Name of Role:** Agatha Hannigan**Name of Original Performer:** Dorothy Loudon**Notable Broadway Revivals:** 1997 (Nell Carter), 2012 (Katie Finneran)**Brief Synopsis of the Show’s Plot:**

Based on *Little Orphan Annie*, the popular comic strip by Harold Gray, *Annie* has become a worldwide sensation. Winner of seven Tony Awards, including Best Musical, the beloved show features a wonderful score written by Charles Strouse and Martin Charmin, including the Broadway smash hit, “Tomorrow”. With a perfect combination of street-smarts and optimism, *Annie* rises from next-to-nothing in New York City. She is determined to find her

parents, who left her at the orphanage years ago. Though things don't quite work out the way she has planned, she manages to thwart the plans of the evil Miss Hannigan and find a new family with billionaire Oliver Warbucks, his secretary Grace Farrell, and her lovable pooch, Sandy.

(Stage Agent)

Brief Character Analysis- Miss Agatha Hannigan:

An alcoholic, orphanage director in her 30's-50's. She hates her job and children. She has one brother, Rooster, who is a con-man.

Vocal type: Mezzo-Soprano with Belt

Brief Song Analysis:

About half-way through Act I, Grace Farrell, Mr. Oliver Warbucks' assistant, comes to the orphanage to find a child to bring to Warbucks' home for the holidays. Annie was already in Miss Hannigan's office and charms Grace, prompting her to ask Hannigan if Annie can be the orphan invited to join Mr. Warbucks for Christmas. Reluctantly, she agrees, Ms. Farrell leaves with Annie, and Miss Hannigan is left tending to the girls of the orphanage. She sings of how annoyed and spent she is caring for the girls and how fed up she is with the life style she has found herself in.

Title of the Song: "Poor Unfortunate Souls"

Name of the musical: *The Little Mermaid*

Name of the Composer: Alan Menken

Name of the Lyricist: Howard Ashman, Glenn Slater

Year of Original Broadway Production: 2008

Name of Role: Ursula

Name of Original Performer: Sherrie Rene Scott

Notable Broadway Revivals: N/A

Brief Synopsis of the Show's Plot:

Beautiful mermaid Ariel should be a happy girl -- she lives in an enchanted undersea country, her father is a King, and she has the most beautiful singing voice. But she is a passionate, headstrong teenager, and wants what she cannot have -- to live on land. When she falls in love with a handsome human prince, Ariel is more determined than ever to gain a pair of legs. But her only option is to defy her furious father, and bargain with Ursula the Sea Witch, giving her voice as the price of entry onto dry land. With the help of Flounder the fish, Scuttle the seagull, and officious court composer Sebastian the crab, Ariel must wordlessly gain Prince Eric's love within three days -- or lose her soul to the ambitious witch! Based on the classic Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale, and the wildly popular Disney film, this musical staging of *The Little Mermaid* features a funny and fanciful book by Doug Wright, with the beloved score by Alan Menken, Howard Ashman, and Glenn Slater in an expanded but completely faithful form, featuring the rambunctious and persuasive "Under the Sea," the romantic expectation of "Kiss the Girl," and that anthem to longing and belonging, "Part of Your World." (Stage Agent)

Brief Character Analysis- Ursula:

A sea-witch, who, in the context of the staged musical, is also King Triton's sister. When their father passed, they each inherited magical items: Triton got the trident, while Ursula received a Nautilus shell. Their father's wish was that they would share in ruling the underwater kingdom

together, but Ursula turned to dark magic, leaving Triton no choice but to banish her from their kingdom.

Vocal type: Mezzo-Soprano with Belt

Brief Song Analysis:

Appearing at the end of Act I, we see Princess Ariel yearning to join the world above the water and her Aunt Ursula giving her an option to make that wish come true. Throughout this number, Ursula tells her niece of all the “good” Ursula has done with magic and how without her help all those who came to her would have stayed miserable. She convinces Ariel to exchange her ability to talk and sing for a pair of legs. While this would leave Ariel with limited ways to communicate on land, it would give her the opportunity to experience life on land.

Title of the Song: “As We Stumble Along”

Name of the musical: *The Drowsy Chaperone*

Name of the Composer: Lisa Lambert, Greg Morrison

Name of the Lyricist: Lisa Lambert, Greg Morrison

Year of Original Broadway Production: 2006

Name of Role: Beatrice Stockwell as The Drowsy Chaperone

Name of Original Performer: Beth Leavel

Notable Broadway Revivals: N/A

Brief Synopsis of the Show’s Plot:

The show begins with Man in Chair welcoming the audience into his apartment. He quickly expresses his love of musical theatre, particularly his admiration for the musical “The Drowsy

Chaperone”, which then comes to life in his home. The plot of *that* show is as follows: When wealthy widow Mrs. Tottenham hosts the wedding of the year, she gets a lot more than a write-up in the society pages: Janet Van de Graaff, glittering starlet of Feldzieg’s Follies, is leaving the stage for love, a turn of events which horrifies the angry and anxious Mr. Feldzieg, whose chief investor has sent two gangsters disguised as pastry chefs to make sure he stops the wedding. Hiring Aldolpho, a Latin lover more vain than virile, to seduce the bride is unsuccessful, as Janet’s chaperone, a drunken diva, gets herself mistaken for the bride and seduced in Janet’s place. It is left to the eager best man, George, to break up the happy pair, when he sends groom Robert Martin out to the garden, blindfolded, and in roller skates. Such are the antics of *The Drowsy Chaperone*, a fictitious 1928 musical comedy. (Stage Agent)

Brief Character Analysis- Drowsy Chaperone:

Janet’s jaded chaperone, perpetually “drowsy” from her private stash of liquor. Her character exists in the time of prohibition, so she carries her own supply of alcoholic beverages. (Ritter and Hopkins)

Vocal type: Mezzo-Soprano with Belt

Brief Song Analysis:

Described as the “rousing anthem to optimistic alcoholism” (Stage Agent), “As We Stumble Along” is sung by the titular character. Since the musical has a ‘show within a show’ structure, the context of the scene has Janet, the bride, asking her confidant, the Chaperone, for advice about her soon-to-be husband, Robert. This song acts as her answer. While it doesn’t help put any of Janet’s worries aside, the show’s narrator, Man in Chair, explains that the actress Beatrice Stockwell, who originally played the Chaperone, required a show-stopping musical number in

every show she was a part of. The song concludes with the Chaperone falling asleep and Janet left to make her own choices with her betrothed.

Title of the Song: “So In Love”

Name of the musical: *Kiss Me, Kate*

Name of the Composer: Cole Porter

Name of the Lyricist: Cole Porter

Year of Original Broadway Production: 1948

Name of Role: Lilli Vanessi

Name of Original Performer: Patricia Morison

Notable Broadway Revivals: 1999 (Marin Mazzie), 2019 (Kelli O’Hara)

Brief Synopsis of the Show’s Plot:

Egotistical leading man, director, and producer Fred Graham is reunited with his ex-wife, Lilli Vanessi, when the two are forced to play opposite one another in a new production of Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*. The battle of the sexes continues onstage and off, as it becomes clear that, as much as this couple profess to hate each other, they also are still in love. Alongside their bickering liaison, the show’s supporting actress, Lois Lane, supports her gambling boyfriend, Bill, as he attempts to evade the clutches of local gangsters. Throw in a number of cases of mistaken identity, the mob, and comedic routines into the mix and you get *Kiss Me, Kate*— a dazzling Broadway classic that earned the very first Tony award for Best Musical. (Stage Agent)

Brief Character Analysis- Lilli Vanessi:

Ex-wife of Fred and betrothed to Harrison Howell, Lilli is a star of the stage and screen.

Similarly to her onstage persona, Katherine (“The Shrew”), Lilli is proud and confident, but also shows signs of vulnerability through the backstage scenes of the show. This is especially true in the song “So In Love”.

Vocal type: Mezzo-Soprano with Belt

Brief Song Analysis:

Having just celebrated the anniversary of their divorce, Lilli receives a bouquet of flowers from Fred in her dressing room. While they were actually meant for Lois, she takes them as her own and admits to herself that she is still in love with her ex-husband. Fred, trying to prevent Lilli from seeing the card is made out to Lois, attempts to take the card back, but Lilli brings it on stage and says she will read it later.

Title of the Song: “Our Children”

Name of the musical: *Ragtime*

Name of the Composer: Stephen Flaherty

Name of the Lyricist: Lynn Ahrens

Year of Original Broadway Production: 1998

Name of Role: Mother

Name of Original Performer: Marin Mazzie

Notable Broadway Revivals: 2009 (Christiane Noll)

Brief Synopsis of the Show’s Plot:

Based on the novel of the same name by E.L. Doctrow, Ahren's and Flaherty's *Ragtime* is a compelling epic capturing the American experience at the turn of the 20th century. Tracking three diverse families in pursuit of the American dream in the volatile "melting pot" of turn-of-the-century New York, *Ragtime* confronts the dialectic contradictions inherent in American reality: experiences of wealth and poverty, freedom and prejudice, hope and despair. Over the course of the show, the worlds of a wealthy white couple, a Jewish immigrant father and his motherless daughter, and an African American ragtime musician intertwine. Together, they discover the surprising interconnections of the human heart, the limitations of justice and the unsettling consequences when dreams are permanently deferred. Featuring many of the historical figures that built and shaped turn-of-the-century America, including J.P. Morgan, Emma Goldman, Harry Houdini, Evelyn Nesbit and Henry Ford, this musical sweeps across the diversity of the American experience to create a stirring epic that captures the beats of the American experience: the marches, the cakewalks and - of course, the ragtime. (Stage Agent)

Brief Character Analysis- Mother:

Mother embodies the quickly shifting ideals of American during the early 20th century. While her husband is away exploring, she must keep her family and home in order. When faced with a challenging decision, upon finding Sarah's baby in her garden, she, regardless of the cultural norms of the time, takes in both mother and child. She is well kept and polished, but shows her vulnerable side and compassion for others, especially through her developing relationship with Tateh.

Vocal type: Mezzo-Soprano with Belt

Brief Song Analysis:

About half-way through Act II, Mother and Tateh meet one another in Atlantic City. She is there with her family on a well-needed vacation, while he has found a new career and life for himself and his daughter after immigrating to America from Latvia. While at the beach, they see their children play together and realize how different their lives had been up until that moment and how it does not make any difference in the possibilities of their friendship. By the end of the song, Tateh also confides in Mother of his past, who accepts him and appreciates that he would trust her with the story of his past.

Title of the Song: “No One is Alone/Children Will Listen”

Name of the musical: *Into the Woods*

Name of the Composer: Stephen Sondheim

Name of the Lyricist: Stephen Sondheim

Year of Original Broadway Production: 1987

Name of Role: the Witch

Name of Original Performer: Bernadette Peters

Notable Broadway Revivals: 2002 (Vanessa Williams)

Brief Synopsis of the Show’s Plot:

“Be careful what you wish for” seems to be the ongoing theme in Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine’s Brothers Grimm inspired musical, *Into the Woods*. The story follows The Baker and his wife, who wish to have a child; Cinderella, who wishes to go the King’s Festival; and Jack, who wishes his cow would give some milk. When the Baker and his wife are visited by the neighborhood witch, who reveals to them that she placed a curse on their family, the two set off

on a journey into the woods to reverse the curse. Also in the woods, we meet Little Red, who is trying to visit her grandmother; the Wolf, who loves tasty little girls; the Witch's daughter, Rapunzel; and the Princes chasing after their loves. By the end of Act I, everyone has gotten their wish and will seemingly live happily ever after. But in Act II, when Jack's beanstalk brings them a visit from an angry Giant, we see how the consequences of their actions haunt them in disastrous ways. The community must come together to save each other and their kingdom, but sacrifices must be made. (Stage Agent)

Brief Character Analysis- The Witch:

Having been placed under a spell by her mother many years ago, this haggard villain holds a grudge against the Baker and his Wife, for it is the Baker's father who caused the curse. In exchange for his deeds, she took the baby the Baker's parents were expecting, named her Rapunzel, and hid her away to raise as her own daughter. This exposition continues to explain how she placed a spell of infertility on the Baker's family, but it can be lifted if they provide her specific ingredients. This not only allows the Baker and his Wife to have a child but releases the Witch of ugliness at the cost of losing her magic powers. She is extremely protective of Rapunzel, and when given the chance to stay with her mother or leave with her prince, Rapunzel breaks ties with the Witch, leaving the Witch alone, bitter, and without her powers.

Vocal type: Mezzo-Soprano with Belt

Brief Song Analysis:

This selection is a small part of a full company finale. The Baker's Wife starts the song by singing to her husband as a spirit in the woods to ensure him that while she is gone, leaving him to raise their child, he is not alone, and she will always be there to watch over them. As it

transitions to the Witch's verse, we hear a reprise of the common theme of *Into the Woods* with "Children Will Listen". Throughout the musical, there are children (Jack, Little Red, Rapunzel, etc.) learning valuable life lessons from their parents or mother/father figures. Whether or not those stories and their conclusions are those we are used to hearing of the beloved characters, they have faced the facts and learned from their experiences.

Title of the Song: "Before the Parade Passes By"

Name of the musical: *Hello, Dolly!*

Name of the Composer: Jerry Herman

Name of the Lyricist: Jerry Herman

Year of Original Broadway Production: 1964

Name of Role: Dolly Gallagher Levi

Name of Original Performer: Carol Channing

Notable Broadway Revivals: 1975 (Pearl Bailey), 1978 (Carol Channing), 1995 (Carol Channing), 2017 (Bette Midler)

Brief Synopsis of the Show's Plot:

Jerry Herman's energetic *Hello, Dolly!* is a musical filled with charisma and with heart. Matchmaker Dolly Levi is a widow, a matchmaker, and also a professional meddler --but everything changes when she decides that the next match she needs to make is to find someone for herself. Set in New York City at the turn of the century, *Hello, Dolly!!* is boisterous and charming from start to finish. *Hello, Dolly!* features such memorable songs as "Before the Parade Passes By," "It Only Takes a Moment," "Put on Your Sunday Clothes," and - of course - the title

number, “Hello, Dolly!” Dolly herself is one of the strongest and richest starring roles for a woman ever written for the musical theatre, and famous Dolly Levis have included Carol Channing, Ethel Merman, Pearl Bailey, Mary Martin, Barbra Streisand, and most recently, Bette Midler and Bernadette Peters. (Stage Agent)

Brief Character Analysis- Dolly Gallagher Levi:

A charming widowed matchmaker who decides to begin her life again and pursue a second marriage. She is multitalented, meddlesome and has the best intentions for herself and her clients. (Ritter and Hopkins)

Vocal type: Alto

Brief Song Analysis:

Realizing that she has wasted precious moments mourning her husband's death when she should have been out enjoying life, Dolly she speaks to deceased husband, Ephraim, about letting her go off to marry half-a-millionaire, Horace Vandergelder. Promising Ephraim that that she will turn over a new leaf and enjoy every minute of her life, Dolly joins the rest of the company at the, literal, parade, and concludes Act I of the show with this musical number. (Field)

Title of the Song: “Everything’s Coming Up Roses”

Name of the musical: *Gypsy*

Name of the Composer: Jule Styne

Name of the Lyricist: Stephen Sondheim

Year of Original Broadway Production: 1959

Name of Role: Rose

Name of Original Performer: Ethel Merman

Notable Broadway Revivals: 1974 (Angela Lansbury), 1989 (Tyne Daily), 2003 (Bernadette Peters), 2008 (Patti Lupone)

Brief Synopsis of the Show's Plot:

Speculated by many (including *NY Times* critic Ben Brantley) to be the greatest of all American musicals, *Gypsy* tells the story of the dreams and efforts of one hungry, powerhouse of a woman to get her two daughters into show business. *Gypsy* is loosely based on the 1957 memoir of famous striptease artist Gypsy Rose Lee, entitled *Gypsy: Memoirs of America's Most Celebrated Stripper*. The memoir and the musical focus on the story of Gypsy Rose Lee's mother, Rose, and earned Rose a place in the theatrical and literary canon as the quintessential, archetypal "Stage Mother." The musical features songs that have become standards of the musical theatre canon, including "Some People," "Let Me Entertain You," "Rose's Turn," and the show-stopping "Everything's Coming Up Roses". *Gypsy* is famous for helping launch lyricist Stephen Sondheim's career, and features a book by Arthur Laurents that is widely considered to be one of the classic examples of a traditional "book musical." At the heart of the musical is the gregarious Rose, whose journey made critic Frank Rich call *Gypsy*, "Broadway's own brassy, unlikely answer to *King Lear*." (Stage Agent)

Brief Character Analysis- Rose:

The ultimate stage mother! Rose lives vicariously through her daughters, Louise and June. She takes them around the country, auditioning for vaudeville houses and pushes them into show business. She controls every aspect of their lives, which, in turn, leaves her life in shambles. She has been married multiple times and finds love in the course of the play with Herbie, but her

headstrongness and controlling persona stands in the way of her own happiness and eventually leads to her breakdown.

Vocal type: Mezzo-Soprano with Belt

Brief Song Analysis:

Appearing at the conclusion of Act I, “Everything’s Coming Up Roses” is a song of hope. At this point in the story, Rose has just learned that her daughter, June, has left her, Louise, and Herbie, to pursue a “real” career as an actress. Rose sulks for a moment, but then quickly comes up with the plan to have Louise star in the new show. This song serves as the vehicle by which Rose convinces Louise and Herbie that they are just getting started and nothing will stand in their way of success.

Songs in Context of the Cabaret

“It’s Today” (*Mame*)

This song opened the cabaret and introduced my audience to the idea of celebrating the present. I wanted to make the opening number as fun and welcoming as possible while highlighting one of my dream roles of Mame Dennis in *Mame*.

“Shy” (*Once Upon a Mattress*)

I sang just the first verse of this song, ending just before the first chorus, to poke fun at one of the roles that I am right for, but played at a much too early age. The lyric fed into a comedic moment where I explained that I am always cast as older roles even when I was as young as ten years old.

“The Wizard and I” (*Wicked*)

I rewrote the lyrics to this song to paraphrase the conversation I had with the head of the BFA Musical Theatre program about my future as a performer. He advised me not to move to New York after graduating, like many of my classmates would, because I am too young to play the characters that I am best suited for. This was a tough pill to swallow as a young actress, but I knew he was right and that it would be in my best interest to take his advice.

“Bali Hai” (*South Pacific*)

As a way of displaying how my voice and physique reflect that of an old, middle-aged woman, “Bali Hai” is sung. I played Bloody Mary in *South Pacific* at 22 and 26 years old but had a child before my second chance to portray this onstage mother. Using my life experience of motherhood help inform my character choices and enhance my performance. I even mention how visiting the south Pacific would provide the last puzzle piece to give me a true understanding of the character, so that when I am the right age to play Bloody Mary, I will have the experience needed to make the performance as authentic as possible.

“Little Girls” (*Annie*)

This song is taken completely out of context of the original musical. In my cabaret, the “little girls” I refer to are the skinnier and petite girls that I always see at auditions. I will also sing about how I have just as much talent, but they keep getting cast.

“Poor Unfortunate Souls” (*The Little Mermaid*)

Also being taken out of the show’s context, this song is rewritten as “Poor Unfortunate Roles”, alluding to the roles that I *can* perform, but I am not the right type for. Some of these roles include Tracy Turnblad from *Hairspray* (since I am too tall,) as well as roles I might physically fit, but are written for a soprano and would never suit my vocal range, like Carlotta from *The Phantom of the Opera*.

“As We Stumble Along” (*The Drowsy Chaperone*)

Kept more or less as written, this song chronicles the struggles of a young actress. As described in the musical, this is a ‘rousing anthem’ sung by the star actress and reflects my efforts to work professionally as a character actress still too young to play the roles my type dictates.

“So In Love” (*Kiss Me, Kate*)

This song, without needing to change any lyrics, will be sung about finding love and the struggles and joys of marriage. I have a wonderful husband who has supported me throughout the process of creating this show and my career as a whole. When we first started to talk about marriage and our future together, I told him about the conversation I had with my advisor and how that inspired me to pursue my career as a performer at a later time in my life when I would be age appropriate for the roles I’m right for. He still tells me that when the time comes, he will support me 100% in following that dream of mine.

“Our Children” (*Ragtime*)

Having two children and following a song about my husband, I will perform this piece to him and in reference to our sons. We often bring our sons to the beach, so the lyrics about seeing children playing in the sand is perfect to tell my story about watching my boys play. Most of the lyrics for this song stay intact, but some minor lyric changes are necessary. Since they distinctly say that one child is light (Caucasian) and one is dark (Eastern European), and both of my children are very light with fair skin and blonde hair, I changed the words to apply to my sons.

“No One is Alone” into “Children Will Listen” (*Into the Woods*)

This mini medley will be performed as written. Stephen Sondheim does a masterful job of composing a piece that discusses the loss of a loved one and how important it is to be a good example for children. This allows me to cover the topics of death and leaving a legacy to inspire others, both as a mother and teacher.

“Before the Parade Passes By” (*Hello, Dolly!*)

This song has an uplifting message that inspires the character to keep going. That is the exact message that I want to include to show that I will know when the right time is to pursue a career in the theatre industry. The song starts off softly but builds to a climatic ending that symbolizes the start of my performing career leading up to where I plan on it going.

“Everything’s Coming Up Roses” (*Gypsy*)

What better way to end my cabaret featuring songs sung by iconic leading ladies than featuring yet another song performed by the mother of all musical theatre roles, Rose. This anthem of a song, similarly to “Before the Parade Passes By”, is not the true eleven o’clock number of *Gypsy*. However, after further examination, “Rose’s Turn” (the ultimate eleven o’clock musical number) reflects a character who has accepted her position and serves as the finale to Rose’s story. My one-woman show is about knowing my position and accepting that my time is still yet to come. That is why the Act I closing number from *Gypsy* where Rose states “Finished? We’re just beginning and there’s no stopping us this time!” as a message of hope and insightfulness is the perfect fit to conclude *Just A Number: A Cabaret Exploring the Roles My Age Prevents Me From Playing*.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE PROCESS

I had a very clear idea of what I wanted to accomplish when I began this process yet made many changes throughout my time working on what would become *Just a Number*. Within one semester of working on my cabaret, I added and nixed over a half dozen song ideas. While exploring the messages I want to convey throughout the performance, I found that some songs, while beautiful and meaningful on their own, did not fit among the others.

Ideas for Cabaret

When researching material for my thesis, I came across many great songs. However, there were some that, as much as I enjoyed singing them and as meaningful their message is, just did not work. Here I will examine those songs, what purpose they would have served in the show, and why I decided to take them out. They are songs taken out of the show for the simple reason that I felt they didn't truly suit the message they express, or the flow of the cabaret include:

“Master of the House” *Les Miserables*

This song would have been included in a medley of roles I was too young to play growing up. I played Madam Thenardier in *Les Miserables* at age 17. This is a character who normally would be cast with an actress in the 40-60-year old age range. While I enjoyed performing it, I could not justify a reason for it in the context of my cabaret, other than being selfish in wanting a chance to sing it for an audience, which I feel would do a disservice to the

song. This is one song I will have to wait to perform again once I am the appropriate age to authentically play the character.

“Stop Time” *Big*

I would have used this in the medley of life experience songs. Being a mother is an indescribable experience and, while this song helps to give an audience an insight on the role of motherhood, I found another song that fit my story better. “Stop Time” talks about an older son, and my children are much younger than the child referenced in the lyrics. I ended up replacing it with “Our Children” from *Ragtime*. In the running order of my cabaret, this song will appear after the number which talks about falling in love (“So In Love” from *Kiss Me, Kate*), so I chose a song that would be directed to my husband and talking about our sons. In addition to it suiting the flow of the show, the children referenced are younger and more playful, which most definitely reflects my own children.

“Everything I Know” *In the Heights*

This is one of the most meaningful songs I have ever performed. The song, in context of the musical it is from, tells the story of Nina, a college-aged Latina girl, who loses a woman who had always been a grandmother figure to her and their tight-knit community. I lost my first grandmother my junior year of college and rewrote the lyrics to pertain to my relationship with her and performed it, through tears, at her memorial service. Just two years ago, I lost my other grandmother and, again, turned to this beautiful song to express how meaningful our relationship was and sang it at her grave side during her funeral. While this song perfectly expresses how it feels to lose someone you love, I know I will never play the role of Nina Rosario. The biggest

challenge I set out for myself in creating this cabaret was only to use material that would be performed by characters I would one day play when I am age appropriate for the role. Not only have I passed the age to be considered for Nina, but I am Caucasian and would not be ethnically appropriate to play the role.

“Rose’s Turn” *Gypsy*

Possibly the most renowned song for any character actress of a certain age, “Rose’s Turn” serves as the climactic conclusion of Rose’s journey through show business and realizing that neither of her daughters need her help. In what many believe to be her breakdown, this song acts as not only the show’s finale, but Rose’s too. As delusional as it might seem, it is during this song that she comes to terms with the notion that her time is up. I wanted to sing this song to honor its place in the canon of 11 o’clock musical theatre numbers. However, as I looked at my own career path, I realized that I am not at the end of my journey, but just at the jumping off point. I replaced this number with “Everything’s Coming Up Roses,” which closes Act I of *Gypsy*. Rose expresses “Finished? We’re just beginning and there’s not stopping us this time!” (Styne) I could not think of a better message to conclude my work. It shows I have come to terms with who I am as a performer and, when the time comes, I will be ready!

Writing Process

I began the writing process during the Summer 2019 semester and continued to edit the text, music, and lyrics until two weeks before my scheduled performance. I had only ever written my own monologues and parodied some lyrics for family and friends, but never in the context of a full cabaret for invited guests to see. As a self-proclaimed perfectionist, I spent hours trying to

find the right lyrics to tell my story through songs that are sung by characters I hope to play one day. I would lay awake in bed, trying to get the perfect rhyme scheme and amount of syllables to fill each measure of music. Needless to say, it was quite the process.

When I began writing, in July 2019, I started to outline the show. My goal was to include roles I played when I was too young to realistically portray the character, my struggles as a young performer, the life experiences that will help me later in my career and finding out who I am as a performer and accepting that. I knew I wanted to use songs from musicals to tell my story, but my challenge was to find songs that are sung by characters I will eventually play that fulfill the ideas of the cabaret. I wanted to include a song about losing a loved one but struggled to find one that was sung by a character I will one day play. As morbid as it sounds, my go-to song about death is “Everything I Know” from *In the Heights*. I sang it at both of my grandmothers’ funerals and know it suits the idea of a song about losing a loved one, but realistically, I would never play Nina. If I were cast in that show, I would be Abuela Claudia but not for another 20-30 years, of course.

When I started, I had a preliminary list of songs that touched on the subjects I wanted to cover, but I wanted to re-write some of the lyrics to suit the message of the cabaret. I knew I wanted to open the show with “It’s Today” from *Mame* and then move into songs that told the story of roles I’ve played at way too young of an age. At first, those roles included: Princess Winnifred from *Once Upon a Mattress* (played at 10 years old,) Madame Thenardier from *Les Misérables* (played at 17 years old,) and Bloody Mary from *South Pacific* (played at both 22 and 26 years old.) I ended up keeping songs for Princess Winnifred and Bloody Mary in the show, but still included Madame Thenardier on a list of roles that I was too young for at the time I

played them. Then I focused on songs that chronicled my struggles as a young actress competing with other actresses of my age. Those songs included “Little Girls” from *Annie*, “Poor Unfortunate Souls” from *The Little Mermaid*, and “As We Stumble Along” from *The Drowsy Chaperone*. Each of these songs will target a different topic: “Little Girls” will discuss skinny girls versus curvier girls; “Poor Unfortunate Souls” will be parodied as “Poor Unfortunate Roles” and talk about the roles I would love to play but, even though I’m the right age, I am not the right type for; and “As We Stumble Along” will cover getting through my younger years and having to wait decades to pursue my acting career.

By the time I got to the songs that talk about life experiences, I wanted to have the audience in my hand and make that moment truly touching and emotional. The songs I have for this portion of the show are “So In Love” (*Kiss Me, Kate*), about meeting my husband; “Our Children” (*Ragtime*), to talk about motherhood; and “No One Is Alone/Children Will Listen” (*Into the Woods*), to touch on losing a loved one and my time as a teacher and using the skills I’ve acquired to inspire other young performers.

I didn’t want to end the show on a down note. Instead, I wanted to close the show with an inspiring set of big, bawdy, leading lady’s songs. I used “Before the Parade Passes By” (*Hello, Dolly!*) to say how before my time is up, I will pursue my dream of performing professionally, and “Everything’s Coming Up Roses” (*Gypsy*). Originally I was going to use “Rose’s Turn” from *Gypsy* to finish the show, but the more I thought about it, the more I realized that to keep the closing number uplifting, I needed the more positive, Act I finale of “Everything’s Coming Up Roses.” This song’s message is a better example of a woman going after what she truly wants, versus “Rose’s Turn” which, though an anthem, is more about accepting what she’s got. I

want to make it clear I am ready when the time comes to pursue my career as an actress and will continue to take what life throws at me as inspiration and experience to apply to those future roles.

At one point of my writing process, during the summer of 2019, I had a dream that I was a swing in a touring company of *Wicked*. In the dream, Earl Weaver, my undergraduate advisor and graduate thesis chair, was our company manager, and he told me I would be going on for the lead role of Elphaba the next day and to call whomever I wanted to see my performance so they could get their tickets. When I woke up, I continued to think of this contemporary mega-musical and how, while I would love to play Elphaba, I would most likely be more of a Madame Morrible type. This inspired me to use the opening verse of “The Wizard and I,” which Morrible sings, as a way to explain how the conversation I had with Earl during my junior year of college about type helped shaped the next ten years of my life. I ended up re-writing many of the lyrics to songs I included in my cabaret and this song was one of them. So instead of “Oh Miss Elphaba! Many years I had waited...” (Schwartz) was re-written as “Oh Miss Monica! Many years you’ll be waiting...” to personalize the lyrics to tell my story of that pivotal moment in my life.

While finding the songs and text to tell my story was of the utmost importance, another major part of the writing process was formatting a proper libretto. One day I spent FOUR HOURS formatting the libretto for my show. I looked through all the songs and typed out the lyrics under each title, and I was inspired to start parodying some of them. While there were plenty of edits along the way, that day I completed the Madame Morrible verse of “The Wizard and I” (*Wicked*), “Little Girls” (*Annie*), and “Our Children” (*Ragtime*). I would be lying if I said I

wasn't tearing up and getting very emotional when working on the lyrics of "Our Children." It made so much sense as written, but still needed a few minor changes to apply to my own children. While many lyrics were changed in the show, I never intended on changing (nor did I think I needed to for the purpose of that moment in the cabaret) any of the lyrics of either of those final two songs. They are considered anthems for the shows they are from and iconic for the women who have played those roles over the years.

After finalizing which songs I knew I wanted to include, I had a sheet music extravaganza! I had my amazingly helpful advisor print out two copies of my sheet music for each song I am using in my show: one for me and one for my accompanist. He also donated a binder so I can keep my music organized; something I would have done anyway, but helpful in the moment that I am handed a few hundred pages of music. I made sure to hole-punch all the music and place the songs in the order I had already determined for the show.

Along with working on the material for my one-woman show, I spent months working on my research chapters, focusing on type and how the industry views and treats curvier actresses. This was not an easy chapter to write. I was faced with some harsh stereotypes of bigger girls and saw how we are compared to smaller girls. This also helped me develop part of my cabaret's libretto; specifically, the song "Little Girls" from *Annie*, which parodied my struggles auditioning and seeing thinner actresses get cast over me, regardless of talent.

At the start of the 2019-2020 school year, I met with the chorus teacher at my school to introduce him to the material I intended on using for my cabaret. He will be accompanying me for the performance, and I wanted to make sure he was at least familiar with the songs. Luckily he was familiar with the songs and excited to hear that I had such a wide range of material

selected to show my skill set. While we are both busy with our own classes and the extra-curricular clubs we sponsor, we planned to find time when we could sit down and actually review the music and make sure they are all in comfortable keys and are cut to best suit the needs of the cabaret. I knew it wouldn't be for a few months, but to say that I was looking forward to that time would have been an understatement.

Rehearsal Process

Due to the time constraints of being a full-time high school theatre director, wife, and mom, finding time to rehearse for my show was a challenge. I had already planned to work with the chorus teacher at my school, Philip Halladay, as an accompanist, but he also has his own schedule and personal life. I continued the writing process throughout the Fall 2019 and Spring 2020 semesters, but I knew I would be limited on time to get the cabaret on its feet before my performance date of March 13, 2020. Little did I know, but due to extenuating circumstances, that date would change.

Halladay and I also had our school musical, *Smile*, performing February 6-8, 2020, that would take up ample time otherwise used to rehearse my cabaret. With the musical scheduled just over a month before the cabaret, we had to be on the same page as far as scheduling was concerned. Once the show was over, we met during my planning period (and his study hall) and created a rehearsal schedule that fit our professional and personal commitments. With all those things considered, we were able to schedule seven rehearsals. This would be the only time we have one-on-one to work on the originally scheduled performance.

Our first rehearsal went well. We spent most of the time making sure he had all the music and knew all the tempos and nuances for each song and any cue lines I had for him. I made him copies of all the music and a working copy of the libretto. I explained that while this is “my” show, I wanted to have a collaboration with him as my music director and accompanist. He made notes throughout our session and asked questions that I was able to clarify. Once he had everything he needed, we started to sing through the show. Keep in mind that it was the first time I sang through my songs with live accompaniment. I had spent months with the material but hadn’t sung it with piano before that day. I’m not sure what it is, but hearing it live for the first time and knowing this was a show that I conceived was very emotional. I’m an emotional person to begin with, and when I got to “Our Children” from *Ragtime*, which I use to tell the story of my two sons, Henry and Benjamin, I completely broke down. I had performed songs for loved ones’ funerals, but I had never sung about my children. Using this song as a vehicle to share my love for Henry and Benjamin was so special. By the second sing through, I was able to hold it together, but nothing will compare to the first time I sang through that song with live piano.

One of the biggest personal challenges I set for myself was creating parodied lyrics of some of the songs I was already familiar with. I was nervous I would revert to the original lyrics of those songs, which would not aid in the storytelling. There were four songs that had either fully re-written lyrics or a few lines of changed text. Those songs include: “The Wizard and I” from *Wicked*, “Little Girls” from *Annie*, “Poor Unfortunate Souls” from *The Little Mermaid*, and “Our Children” from *Ragtime*. If I were to slip up, a song I parodied about being a full-figured actress would turn into one about an overworked and alcoholic orphanage director. Needless to say, the pressure was on to ensure the lyrics were sung as intended for the sake of my story.

The more I rehearsed the parodied songs, the more I realized that since I wrote those lyrics, I had them down! On the contrary, there were four songs for which I had trouble remembering the original lyrics! Those songs included: “It’s Today” from *Mame*, “Our Children” from *Ragtime*, “Before the Parade Passes By” from *Hello, Dolly!* and “Everything’s Coming Up Roses” from *Gypsy*. These songs are fairly repetitive, so getting the lyrics down proved more challenging than I had anticipated. Maybe it was their importance in my story, but I kept psyching myself out and needing to look at the lyrics when rehearsing. They were all songs I had listened to over and over, but for some reason, it wasn’t until the week of the show that I truly felt confident in the lyrics to those songs.

The last week before my scheduled performance, I invited the students who would be assisting with my show. I had four students volunteer to help set up the band room for the show and assist with crowd control, simple lighting elements, and recording the performance for my committee members to see. My committee was all in central Florida, so I had to record my cabaret so they would be able to see it. This would give them a chance to see how I used my research of type-casting and created a show documenting the life of a character actress too young to play the roles she will one day be the right age for. Getting all those students to attend my rehearsals was a bit challenging, since they all had their own lives and other commitments to their academics and families. But they were all on board to make the show happen.

The show was originally scheduled for Friday night, March 13, 2020. On Saturday, March 7th, my son, Henry, fell and injured his leg. We ended up in the hospital that week and I was left with no choice but to postpone my cabaret. Family will always come first, and I knew that rescheduling the show for a later date would not affect the show itself and may even allow

more people to come, who originally were not available. On top of my family's needs, the coronavirus started, and schools were closed for two weeks, so I would not have my venue nor student volunteers available to make the show happen as originally planned. The research still proved itself for the purpose of my thesis, but the performance, while it was ready to go, would have to wait...just like my career.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

In creating a one-woman show that explores the idea of type-casting and owning one's self, I knew I would learn more about how I see myself as a performer, but I never realized it would affect the way I teach. I started this process to help myself prepare for a future in the theatre industry and part of that process was teaching others along the way until I am old enough to pursue that career; something to keep a steady income while still surrounding myself in the world of theatre arts. By taking what I've learned in working on my thesis, I have become a stronger and more knowledgeable actress and teacher.

Since I already had a good grasp of my type, the main focus of my personal process was finding the songs that suited my type in the theatre industry and best told my story. There are thousands of songs in the musical theatre world, but not all of them were suitable for me or my journey to discovering who I am as a performer. I was familiar with the songs I ended up using in my cabaret, but it wasn't until I dove into the research of each show and the performers who originated those roles that I realized how much more material I should be looking at. This is a great lesson for all performers, regardless of type, to experience.

I have even incorporated it into my teaching! I ask my students to find one character they feel they are truly suited for and then research the actors who have played that role and then go down the rabbit hole to see what other roles for which they may be appropriate. By the end of the lesson, each student has a project resembling a family tree of roles they can one day play. This helped me in exploring new options for material and opens my students' eyes to the possibilities that already exist in theatre that they may not have otherwise known.

When defining who one is as a performer, they may face some tough love, but the goal should always be to find acceptance in yourself as an artist. This lesson now has been passed onto me and through my extensive research of the industry and the musical theatre canon, I can (with confidence) say that I know the types of roles for which I am right. That is, for now. How I am viewed in the theatre world may change. It is inevitable that life will throw things at you that you have no control over. As I continue to grow, I will discover new things about myself. My body may change, and I may go through life experiences that alter how I am then seen by casting directors. While I cannot predict the future, I can accept myself for the performer I am today and hope that the work I have completed on my thesis will continue to guide me, and subsequently my students, on the journey to success in the theatre industry.

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