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MUSIC DIRECTION AND PIANO ACCOMPANIMENT
IN MUSICAL THEATRE:
A PRACTICAL GUIDE

by

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B.F.A. University of Central Florida, 2012

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts with a concentration in Musical Theatre
in the Department of Theatre
in the College of Arts and Humanities
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ABSTRACT

Music direction for musical theatre is not a topic that has been widely theorized, defined, or researched; there are a handful of resources available to the inclined reader, and a scant few universities that offer a degree in Music Direction for Musical Theatre. Due to this, many music directors, myself included, have had to piece together our educations á la carte, researching each aspect of the job individually. Thus, I have created a practical “how to” guide that can be used to advance you, the reader, through a production as the music director from booking the gig to closing night.

In Chapter One, I defined the role and common responsibilities of a music director and accompanist for musical theatre, acknowledged common methodologies, and discussed how a music director should prepare for rehearsals. I also talked through teaching the material and the importance of communicating with the theatre company, director, choreographer, and fellow band members.

Chapter Two provides my personal philosophies on the most important ways to train, and the skill sets and personality traits I believe are the most important. I examined several personal experiences as music director, sub, and accompanist, and discussed what I learned from each, including the importance of sight reading, adaptability, collaboration, the impact of dramatic timing, acting, basic conducting, vamps and safeties, and how to overcome common obstacles.

As stated, my aim was to research and reflect in order to craft a comprehensive guide that can be referenced in a number of circumstances for both the novice and accomplished music director and/or accompanist. Not every tactic will fit every person, though with a combination of

research, honest and transparent anecdotal support, and “With a Little Bit of Luck,” I am confident every person can discover some bit of value from this project.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Theatrical performance has existed in various forms for millennia. Since its infancy early in the 5th century the craft has continued to develop, morph, and grow, attracting multitudes of art-thirsty audiences and masochistic performers like moths to a flame. Even with this distant origins story, it wasn't until *The Black Crook* in 1866 that the world was gifted its first musical, and not until *Show Boat* in 1927 that we saw our first book musical. Both of these shows laid the necessary foundation upon which theatre today is built. Given these facts, one could presume that the role of the music director is clearly defined and universal. After all, we've been following the format of the book musical for 95 years, right? Not quite. There is a lot of work that goes into music directing a production that many are not aware of, and it's certainly not as simple as 'the music director directs the music for a performance.'

To begin properly addressing this statement, I must first acknowledge that the responsibilities of a music director differ depending on the level of theatre in question. For example, the music director for a brand new musical that is still being workshopped has an additional subset of responsibilities that the music director for a small regional theatre who is producing *Annie* for the umpteenth time does not. My experience has largely been with the latter and so it is from this perspective that I write. To ensure reasonable comprehension of this project for all readers, I have crafted a glossary that elaborates on key items defined throughout the text. Additionally, from this point on I will adopt the abbreviation "MD" for music director.

Types of Musicals

In theatre there are many different types of performances: plays, musicals, melodramas, operas, concerts, ballets, operettas, commedia, recitals, pantomimes, immersive, improvisation, and each category can be broken down further into genres like comedic, dramatic, classic, farce, satirical, etc. For the purpose of this project, I'd like to specifically examine musical theatre and identify the varying types within that category. While the following section may seem dense or dry, the information presented is crucial for a comprehensive understanding. First and foremost, what makes a musical different from a play? Musicals prominently feature music, singing, and dancing, in combination with spoken word and a narrative storyline, whereas plays are dialogue heavy and only occasionally feature music, instruments, singing or movement/dance. Music directors are always needed for musicals and music-based performances and are typically only needed for plays that have music.

What about different types of musicals? Under the umbrella of musical theatre, there are several main types: book musicals, revues, jukebox musicals, concept musicals, rock musicals/operas, and megamusicals. Let's dive in!

A book musical is any performance that relies on both musical numbers and dance to further the plot. The first time this idea was successfully brought to fruition was in 1927 with the musical *Show Boat*. The wide success of this show lit a fire in the artistic community, and musical theatre was never the same. It is because of *Show Boat* that we have *Carousel*, *West Side Story*, *My Fair Lady*, and more contemporary hits such as *Hamilton*, *The Color Purple*, *Wicked*, and *In the Heights*, all of which fit into the book musical category. While it's possible for one

musical to fit into multiple categories, the book musical is the type of musical you'll encounter the most.

A revue musical, while also featuring musical numbers and dancing, is less focused on a storyline and more on each number as individual pieces. Storylines of revue musicals are less narrative in nature and rely more on thematic elements to weave each number together cohesively. Examples of revue musicals include *Edges*, *Marry Me a Little*, *SHOUT! The Mod Musical*, *Side by Side* by Sondheim, *Songs for a New World*, and *The World Goes 'Round*.

Next in the lineup are jukebox musicals, which can be similar to book musicals in that they often feature musical numbers and dancing that furthers a narrative storyline; however, what makes this class of musicals unique is that they use pre-existing songs. Some jukebox shows use music all from one artist, and others use a collection of works by various artists. Examples of jukebox musicals include *American Idiot* (music by Green Day), *Mamma Mia!* (music by ABBA), *Tina: The Tina Turner Musical* (music by Tina Turner), *Beautiful: The Carole King Musical* (music by Carole King, and Ms. King in conjunction with Gerry Goffin, with other songs by Barry Mann, Cynthia Weil, Phil Spector, et al.) and *Moulin Rouge* (which successfully used 71 songs!) by artists such as Labelle, Fatboy Slim, Shakira, OutKast, David Bowie, Lorde, Beyoncé, Madonna, Rihanna, Whitney Houston, Elton John, Rolling Stones, Queen, Pat Benatar, Lady Gaga, Gnarl Barkley, Adele, et al.) (Kircher).

This next category can be a tricky one to pin down. The concept musical. This type of musical is sometimes nonlinear and concentrates more on a main “theme, metaphor or concept... [which is] just as important as the overarching plot and the featured songs” (“Different Types of Musical”). Writers and directors are also known to use this type of musical to make a statement

of some kind, politically, socially, or otherwise. The concept musical that really lit the torch for future generations of its kind was *Cabaret*. When *Cabaret* opened in 1966, “audiences were growing tired of the ever-more formulaic fare offered up by the likes of Rodgers and Hammerstein (*The Sound of Music*, *The King and I*), one of the preeminent musical theatre writing teams of Broadway’s Golden Age” (Jess). There was also a yearning for something other than the tired plots often employed by Learner and Loewe (*My Fair Lady*, *Camelot*) surrounding “love and righteousness” (Jess). The writers of *Cabaret* answered the call by highlighting the darkness of 1931 Nazi Germany through “doomed romance[s] between a Gentile and a Jew,” an American writer and an English performer (Sally Bowles), and through Sally’s cabaret performances at the Kit Kat Klub in Berlin (Jess). The show was an instant success, largely due to its tragically relatable plot that revolved around the Holocaust. Another great example of a concept musical is Stephen Sondheim and George Furth’s *Company*, as it “introduced a non-linear script, one that occurred in flashback and memory - not a narrative story, but a series of overlapping incidents” (Gottfried). Additional examples of concept musicals include *Hair*, *A Chorus Line*, *Allegro*, and *Avenue Q*.

Rock musicals or rock operas, in its attempt to “make a...story seem more relatable to modern day audiences,” use more contemporary styles of music (“Different Types of Musical”). These musicals usually feature music written specifically for the production, but not always. One of the most famous rock musicals is *The Who’s Tommy*; other examples include *Spring Awakening*, *Next to Normal*, *Rent*, *Grease*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Jagged Little Pill*, *We Will Rock You*, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, *Rock of Ages*, and *Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson* (Karyn). Hollywood even produced a cult classic rock opera called *Repo! The Genetic Opera*.

Finally, the megamusical. In the early 1980s, Broadway producers were trying to come up with a way to keep audiences engaged and shows running longer than ever before. After all, Broadway is a business. They began looking to the Hollywood Blockbuster and the undeniable popularity of extravagant and lush Golden Age movie musicals such as *Top Hat*, *An American in Paris*, *42nd Street*, *Footlight Parade*, and *Gold Diggers*, as well as anything by Busby Berkeley (Harris). From these sprang the inspiration to create the first official megamusical, *CATS*, which was also “the first known instance where an entire cast was individually outfitted with radio microphones” (“Megamusical”). Megamusicals are very large, and much like the aforementioned films, will usually feature some sort of special effect or “element of flash” (“The Truth About Mega Musicals...”). Though these productions were more costly to produce, their longer runs more than made up for the financial sacrifice. That said, it will probably not surprise you to know that *The Phantom of the Opera*, *Wicked*, *Les Miserables*, *Miss Saigon*, *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Lion King* are all considered megamusicals.

Responsibilities of a Music Director

Depending on who you ask, the explanation of what a music director does can be nebulous, though certain responsibilities do tend to come up repeatedly: first and foremost, it is universally agreed upon that the MD is responsible for teaching the cast any and all sung music in the show during the rehearsal period, as well as rehearsing and fine tuning all music with the musicians in the band. While stating that the music director directs the music for a performance is accurate, it is a vast oversimplification of responsibilities and nuances. Most levels of theatre also find the music director serving as the conductor for performances, and frequently from the

piano. If the MD is not also the conductor, then they may be found serving as the pit keyboard [1, 2 or 3] player, or in some instances, the percussionist. When they are not the conductor, which is rare, they are sometimes responsible for finding one; this depends on the company and level of theatre (community theatre, educational, non-union professional, union, Broadway, etc.). Music directors are often present throughout the auditioning process and are frequently encouraged to make casting recommendations to the casting director, artistic director, director, choreographer, and whoever else is present or has a say in the final casting decisions for the production. The MD also plays a part in crafting together the rehearsal schedule, working closely with the director, choreographer and stage management team to determine the best use of time. They often also serve as the rehearsal accompanist, attending all music rehearsals, as well as any additional rehearsals for which the director and choreographer may require them. This set of responsibilities is at the core of what a music director does. From here, additional duties can differ from one company to the next based on their needs, and could include things such as reporting musician's services to payroll; in the event they themselves are not the rehearsal accompanist, they may be asked to find and hire one; the MD may be asked to find and hire pit musicians; when working with a company that uses microphones (which happens often), they typically work with the sound designer on balancing the levels to their liking; MDs will often attend and report at production meetings with the rest of the artistic and management teams; if the MD or pit musicians are members of a union, certain contracts must be used, so working with that union to ensure proper documentation is a must; some companies ask that the MD lead vocal warmups pre-show; if it is required/requested, brush-up rehearsals are sometimes scheduled and attended by the cast and/or musicians (these rehearsals are typically added when there has been a

break in the performance schedule, for shows with particularly difficult harmonies, to incorporate notes from stage management, etc.); in select situations, mostly with new pieces, the music director can be asked to complete transcription work, vocal arrangements, or orchestrations; and if an understudy has a put-in rehearsal for a role they will be performing, the music director will sometimes participate, though these rehearsals are usually run by stage management and the dance or show captain. An overachieving music director will also make accompaniment recordings prior to the first day of rehearsals for use by the artistic team and cast, if accompaniment recordings are not supplied by the licensing company, which I will discuss later on. These recordings can sometimes be used in choreography rehearsals if the MD is running their own rehearsal, or they can be used to practice at home. Supplying something like this is especially crucial when your rehearsal time is limited. That's a fairly hefty to-do list, as you can see. MDs can wear many hats throughout the rehearsal process and run of a show, so flexibility is a must when working for various companies as you never know with exact certainty what you will be asked to do. Come with me, reader, and we'll discuss the how-tos for the to-dos.

Pre-Rehearsal Preparations

“Let's start at the very beginning / A very good place to start.” - Do-Re-Mi, *The Sound of Music*.

As per the title of this project, my main focus is how to maneuver working as a music director and accompanist for musical theatre, the good, the bad, the ugly, and all mishaps and mayhem in between. First, let's walk through a typical gig as MD/accompanist, beginning with the moment you learn you've booked the gig, and we'll dig deeper into how you should

accomplish all of the responsibilities listed above. So, you've received a physical or verbal offer to music direct a show, you accept, and then receive your contract. Congratulations! Your first task is to familiarize yourself with the material, which you can do in whatever way works best for you. You want to really know the material well before rehearsals begin - and not just the music. Learn the story, the characters, the arc, the vibe, the writers, composers; know as much about the show as you can. One way to do that is to listen to the original cast recording. The only caveat regarding this practice is that some MDs adamantly believe you should not listen to any recording of a show you're music directing, for fear of being influenced by any artistic choices. I feel conflicted about this and here's why: if you consider that the original Broadway cast recording of a show represents the vision or concept of the original director and music director, then pulling inspiration from it is an excellent way to ensure you are doing their work justice. Personally, listening to Original Broadway Cast recordings has always been helpful for me as it inspires me creatively. I look at it as a collaboration between the original music director and myself; I accept suggestions from the recording when I want to, and if I prefer making my own creative choice, then I make my own creative choice. There's still an argument here against listening to the recording: the score that you receive from the licensing company should reflect the way the songs were performed originally with regard to dynamics, tempos, etc. So, shouldn't a trained musician be able to simply look at the score and hear the song without ever pressing play on the ol' jukebox? Maybe so, but I find that the best MDs exercise humility and curiosity, seeking out inspiration from any and every available resource. Besides, listening to a recording is undeniably helpful when faced with tricky rhythms, tempos, or when faced with an extreme time crunch. And while honoring the material is part of the job, it's just that, a part. Another part is

taking the material and making it work for *your* vision. MDs who refuse to listen to recordings seem to be putting more importance on this part of the job, which is their prerogative, and depending on the individual, listening to the sheet music, not a recording, is better for unleashing their creativity. That's one of the beautiful things about the artistic processes - as long as the objective is met, you can pursue nearly any path to get there. So, what is the music telling you about the story and the characters? How is each song structured as an individual piece, how do the songs fit together? Do you hear subtext in the music? Do characters have certain melodies or instruments that follow them throughout the show? Listen. Listen to a recording. Listen to what's on the page. And don't just listen, *hear*.

The familiarization of the show and the music isn't just focused on how it sounds, but *why* it sounds that way. In order to better understand the sacred 'why' of the music, I strongly encourage getting a feel for the time period in which the show is set by researching and identifying common attributes or elements of the time, and then looking closely at the score to find moments where you can put them to use. The time period will help reveal the intended style of the show, so allow the whispers of history to direct your direction - most of the time. Some contemporary pieces of musical theatre veer away from tradition, creating a juxtaposition between setting and style that many audience members may find refreshing and edgy. Shows such as *Hamilton*, *Spring Awakening*, and *Moulin Rouge* are excellent examples of this. The box office hit *Hamilton* is set in the late 1700s to early 1800s and features hip-hop music by the uber-talented and award-winning composer, lyricist and actor, Lin-Manuel Miranda, which is nothing close to what a viewer might expect given the setting of the show. *Spring Awakening*, while set in the 1890s, relates the teenage characters' emotional journeys through folksy alternative rock

music, more with the musical vibes of the 1990s when the musical was written. And *Moulin Rouge*, also set in the 1890s, features a wide array of music, none of which existed in that era. But let's examine a bit closer, a show that aligns more with our expectations like the Andrew Lloyd Webber megamusical, *The Phantom of the Opera*. The show's prologue begins in the year 1919 in Paris, France, and then transitions back to 1881 where it stays for the remainder of the story. Your research could begin with a simple visit to your favorite search engine with the prompt, "musical elements from the late 1800s Paris." You will find rather quickly that 1881 is right in the heart of the Romantic era (1800-1900) of classical music, but even more specifically, Paris was in the Belle Époque period, which saw compositions erring "away from Romanticism toward Impressionism in music and Modernism" ("History of Music in Paris"). What does that mean? During the Romantic period composers were writing with more freedom, more expression and intense emotion, more dynamics, and grandiose orchestrations. Instrumentation of the time was rich with increasing numbers of string instruments, woodwinds, and brass (Thomas). Impressionism in music "was a movement...whose music focuses on mood and atmosphere, 'conveying the moods and emotions aroused by the subject rather than a detailed tone-picture'" (qtd. in "Impressionism In Music"). Vocal style of the time was mostly opera, and most songs were about "love, nature, or both" ("A History of Music for Singers"). Research the opera vocal quality, historical events of the setting, and have, at the very least, a basic idea of what life then was like. Next, research the year the musical itself was written, the writers, composers, their styles, themes, other works, etc. If you are familiar with *The Phantom of the Opera* the musical, you'll know it was written in 1986 and based on a 1910 French novel by Gaston Leroux, and if you've ever heard the original cast recording, you'll notice that it was heavily influenced by the

over-synthesized sounds of the 1980s. Thankfully, many productions today have abandoned that obtrusive stylization. All of this to say, if you end up with a very folksy or poppy vocalist in your cast of *The Phantom of the Opera*, you'll need to address this early in the rehearsal process to ensure you're getting more of an operatic style from them. Making artistic decisions along this vein will add a level of authenticity that would set your production apart from others.

Much of this research is to be completed before you have obtained the score, which will be supplied to you by the theatre you're working for, after they have applied for the licensing, been approved by the licensing agency, and signed a contract. Many people involved in theatre have heard of Music Theatre International (MTI) because the baton-waving man in their logo appears on the scores and librettos of all of the shows they license. The rights to major classics such as *Brigadoon*, *Damn Yankees*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Les Miserables*, *My Fair Lady*, Disney hits like *Beauty and the Beast*, *High School Musical*, *The Lion King*, *Newsies*, newer shows like *Come From Away*, *Dear Evan Hansen*, *Kinky Boots*, and *Something Rotten!*, and a wide array of Broadway junior and TYA productions, are all controlled by MTI. As per the standards of licensing contracts through MTI, most theatres receive their materials approximately two months prior to opening night, and companies must return the materials within seven days of closing night ("FAQ"). Thankfully, MTI, having been founded in 1952 by composing legend Frank Loesser and Broadway orchestrator Don Walker, understands that productions require preparation, sometimes well in advance of the first day of "school," i.e. the first rehearsal. They offer the option to receive the piano score and libretto up to a year in advance of opening night, free of charge ("FAQ").

Another leading licensing company in the world of theatre is Concord Theatricals. With catalogs from Andrew Lloyd Webber, Samuel French, Rodgers and Hammerstein, Tams-Witmark, musicals for youth and teens (or theatre for young audiences; TYA), plays, concerts, new works and classics, Concord Theatricals also has a label group, music publishing, and Concord originals. Both MTI and Concord Theatricals offer extensive resources such as professionally designed props, digital scripts and scores, logo and social media marketing packages, performance and rehearsal accompaniment tracks, sound effects, RehearScore, video licensing, keyboard patches, transpositions, ticketing with BookTix and ShowTix4U (for online ticketing services), and more. And do keep in mind, these two companies are not the only source for licensing theatrical materials. Other companies include Theatrical Rights Worldwide, Broadway Licensing and its family (Dramatists Play Service, Playscripts, and Stage Rights), Disney Theatrical Licensing, Andrew Lloyd Webber Show Licensing, The Musical Company, and even a new, all digital theatrical licensing company called Uproar Theatrics. Regardless of where and when you receive your materials, be sure to supply your musicians with their corresponding instrument books as soon as possible so they can also begin to familiarize themselves with the music.

From the accompaniment standpoint, once you receive the score and begin working through it, there are a few things to look out for. One of them is difficult or unusual time signatures (or meters) and key signatures. On one of their message boards, *Broadway World* posed a “Question to all the pianists out there: What was the hardest Broadway piece you’ve encountered?” Many people weighed in, with some specifying the reason as, “And then it goes to six or seven flats...” (CJ N2N) “...difficult to play...because of the keys...” (fingerlakessinger)

“...numerous changes in time signature, key...” (Alan Henry) If at this point you are a learned pianist/accompanist, you should have a decent idea of what time and key signatures are more difficult for you to play. These variables can be deceiving, as one commenter pointed out, “I really dislike playing in C major/A minor however - my hands aren’t shaped for it and my fingers are too long...” (hyperbole_and_a_half). If you are unaware, C major and A minor have no sharps or flats. A beginner pianist might think, the less black keys, the less accidentals, the less to worry about, the easier to play. But reader, imagine a keyboard in front of you. Now in your mind’s eye, place your hands on the keys. Where do they line up? Do you have small hands with shorter fingers that line up better with the white keys? Or like myself and this commenter, do you have longer fingers that naturally extend up onto the black keys? What may be easy for one, may be quite a challenge for another. So, spend time with the pieces that are tough for you. Practice them obsessively because practice makes progress (not perfection - there is no such thing as perfection, so go ahead and let that go right now).

Heed specific tempo markings and annotations at the beginning or throughout a piece, as they can give the accompanist a lot of clues as to the spirit or feel of the piece. Markings can include descriptors like *lento*, *adagio*, *andante*, *moderato*, *presto*, *tempo di marcia*, *funky*, *big*, *brighter*, *ominous Cha-Cha tempo*, *relentlessly cheerful*, *intimately*, *cute yet frightening*, you name it and there is a tempo marking for it somewhere in musical theatre. Take these to heart; they are there for a reason. In some cases, they can even bring great laughs. The following are actual tempo markings on published pieces:



Figure 1: Tempo marking, “Antisocially; play without taking picture and uploading to Facebook”

Source: ClassicFM <https://www.classicfm.com/discover-music/latest/bizarre-performance-directions/>

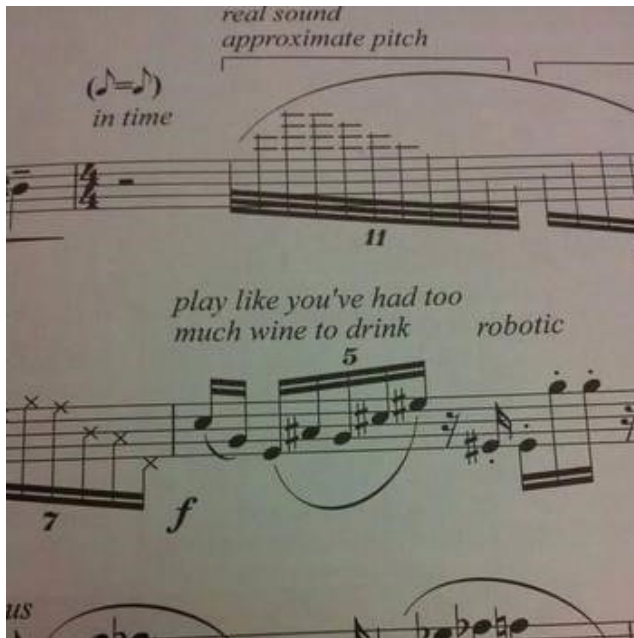


Figure 2: Tempo marking, “Play like you’ve had too much wine to drink”

Source: ClassicFM <https://www.classicfm.com/discover-music/latest/bizarre-performance-directions/>

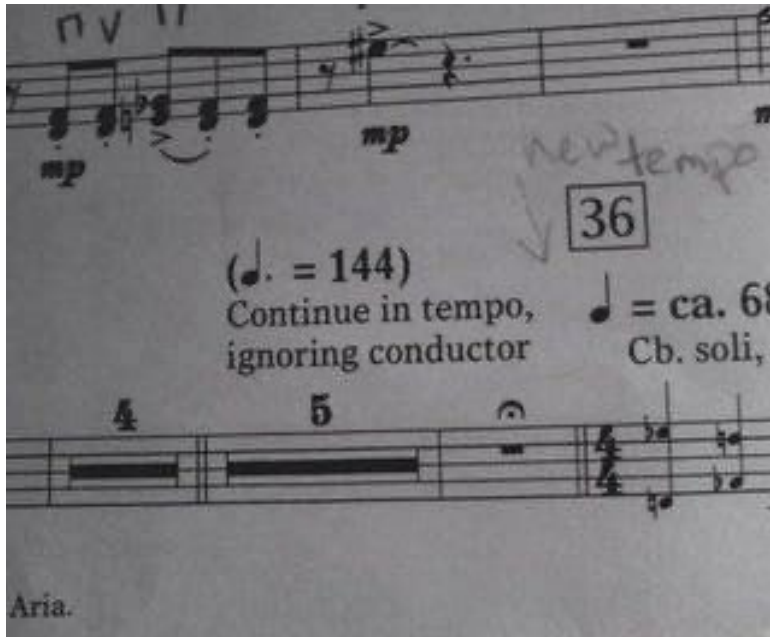


Figure 3: Tempo marking, "Continue in tempo, ignoring conductor"

Source: ClassicFM <https://www.classicfm.com/discover-music/latest/bizarre-performance-directions/>



Figure 4: Tempo marking, "Tempo di-sturb de neighbors"

Source: Reddit user homuraakemi5

https://www.reddit.com/r/piano/comments/7pup29/tempo_disturb_de_neighbors/

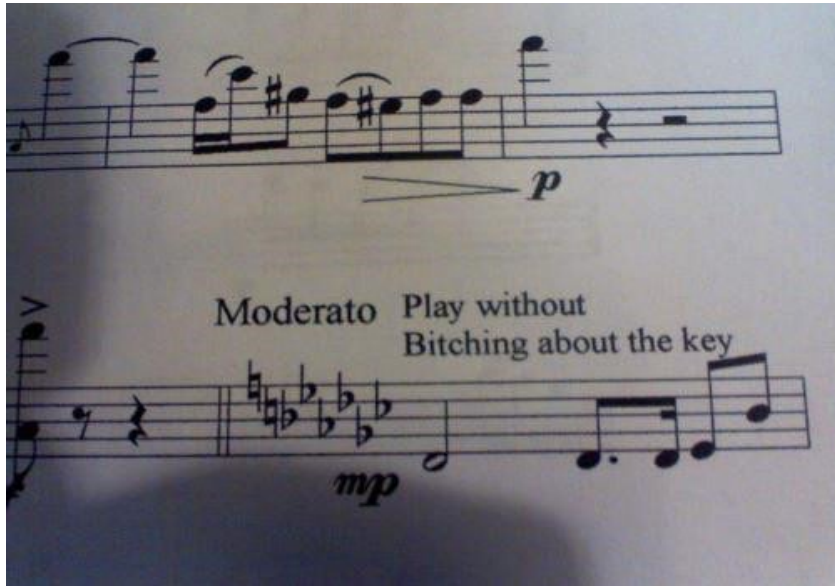


Figure 5: Tempo marking, “Play without Bitching about the key”

Source: Open Culture <https://www.openculture.com/2017/05/play-without-bitching-about-the-key-and-other-humorous-blunt-annotations-added-to-musical-scores.html>



Figure 6: Tempo marking, “Tempo di haul ass”

Source: Twitter user @ThreatNotation <https://twitter.com/ThreatNotation/status/1494007684391223299>

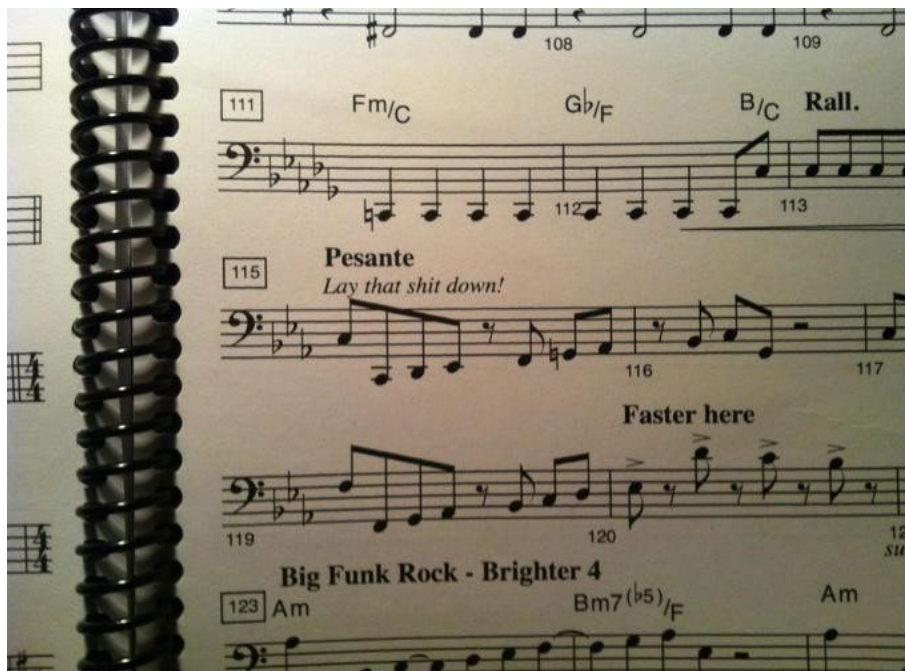


Figure 7: Tempo marking, “Pesante; lay that shit down!”

Source: Open Culture <https://www.openculture.com/2017/05/play-without-bitching-about-the-key-and-other-humorous-blunt-annotations-added-to-musical-scores.html>

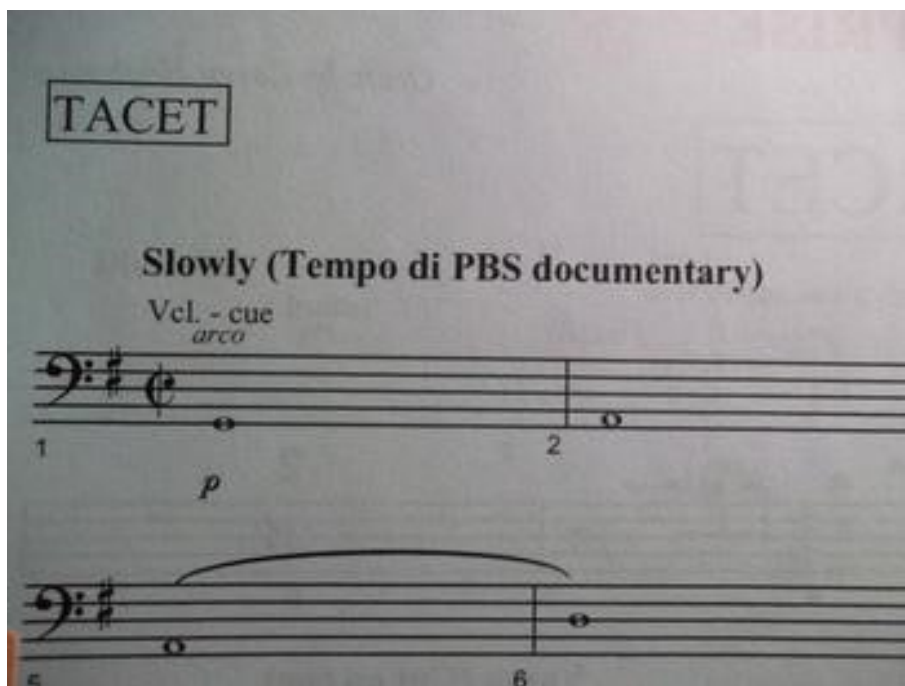


Figure 8: Tempo marking, “Slowly (Tempo di PBS documentary)”

Source: ClassicFM <https://www.classicfm.com/discover-music/latest/bizarre-performance-directions/>

Additional elements of the score that will require close attention are vamps, safeties, cues, and segues. If you are working only as a pit musician for a production, know that vamps and safeties will be addressed during the rehearsal process with the director, MD, and actors as the show comes together, and depending on the director, they may or may not want to set these concretely. If your director wants to have these pre-set, meaning they would repeat the same amount of times each performance, there are some pros and cons you should be aware of. To illustrate, I'll use "Voulez-Vous" from *Mamma Mia!* as an example. In this musical number, Sophie learns that each of her potential dads have figured out why they've been invited to the island for her wedding, and they each vow to be the man to walk her down the aisle. Hilarity ensues. These quick asides happen in specific vamped moments of the song "Voulez-Vous," and once they're through, the band should finish playing the rest of the vamp and then continue the song in stride. If there is too much of a pause, you're at risk of losing some of the comedy and flow of the show. And vice versa. If the band moves on and the ensemble enters with their next line of lyrics before the final couple of words are spoken in the aside, you will definitely lose the moment and the audience could become confused. So, while setting a vamp to be repeated four times every performance grants the band and cast a consistent amount of music, it does not allow for varying levels of audience reaction. If you have a raucous Saturday night crowd who finds one of these asides particularly funny, and your vamps are set, they will likely laugh well into the next sung section. If, as Seth Rudetsky called it back in 2013, an actor enters the white room and goes up on a line (i.e. forgets his line) or there is any kind of extra pause, you're at risk of being screwed, if you will ("Onstage & Backstage"). If you're doing a heavy drama and an actor's dog died earlier that day, they might experience deeper emotions and need extra time in a scene that

having vamps set would prevent them from having. If vamps are not set and you have a band member who is inexperienced in musical theatre and finds it difficult to read the MD's body language, he might move on from the vamp early or late. If a sub is in the pit for a performance, the same could occur. It's vital you note the cue lines used to move on from vamps and safeties very clearly, and it is imperative you communicate these cues to your band.

Cues for the start of each song are always set. Whether it be a specific line of dialogue in the script, a specific move from an actor, a light cue, or an audience reaction, cues are always predetermined. That does not mean they'll always be consistent. As mentioned above, if a certain actor's line is the cue and they're off in the white room, you might not ever get the cue. If an actor entering the stage is the cue and they miss their entrance - well, just hope that never happens to you, reader. What if the band has a long break during a tedious scene and you just can't figure out the daily Wordle and you miss the cue? The pause that you'll suddenly become aware of is the longest pause you'll hear in your life. There is no greater trespass, and you'll feel just awful. All you can do is note at the top of each song what the cue is, and if you find it helpful, note a warning line as well, which is the line to listen for that reminds you to get ready for the cue. These cues must also be shared with your band.

Finally, be sure to write, circle or highlight segues. Some songs will move directly into the next without stopping for a scene. This occurs most often when there is a set change after a song. The actors finish the number, the audience applauds, there's a blackout, and the set change commences. Set changes in the clear (this means without music of any kind) are typically not preferred as depending on the pieces being moved, they can be loud. So, when you know a segue is coming, as MD, be ready to cue this. If you're just working as the accompanist, then keep your

eye, or at least your peripheral focus, on your MD. I recommend waiting just a breath before plunging ahead. Let the actors hear their applause. Let whatever drama just unfolded land. Otherwise, you could risk ruining the moment and robbing the audience (and potentially the actors) of the experience, which is the antithesis of the intention behind live theatre! Try not to rush; you'll feel it.

Let us now refocus our attention back to your MD duties. You've familiarized yourself with the show, you've received the score from the licensing company, you've practiced, now you'll want to find out about the theatre's typical band practices. Or, to use tracks, or not to use tracks, that is the question, and a fairly divisive one at that. In 2010, a director reached out to Jason Robert Brown after running into issues with the pianist who was hired to play for their production of *The Last Five Years*. This director was worried their show could be compromised and asked Brown whether an accompaniment CD was available in lieu of using live accompaniment. Brown had a few choice words, including, "I am unutterably opposed to using recorded accompaniment...for any of my shows. There is a communion between musicians and actors that is the only real part of musical theater that interests me" ("Ask JRB: The Pianist Can't Hack It"). Further along in his response, he recommends that the hired pianist "should be fired and replaced" ("Ask JRB: The Pianist Can't Hack It"). He does acknowledge the possibility that the production in question may be at a smaller theatre with a limited budget, and so hiring a more professional accompanist may not be possible. Many theatre professionals can understand that dilemma. But he still states that he "didn't write this music to be performed badly... [and] if you're not prepared to create a professional product, then you have to be satisfied with whatever it is you've signed on to create. I can't abet that lack of respect for the musical element of a show

by sending out a recorded version of the score” (“Ask JRB: The Pianist Can’t Hack It”). See what I mean by divisive? While I understand where Brown is coming from, his words presume the privileges of a theatre with deep pockets and resources. One would think writers and/or composers would be so thrilled to have created successful works that they would want anyone and everyone to see it. But perhaps that is a sentiment best saved for the small-time or up-and-coming individual. Setting the politics of using tracks aside, I’ve personally worked with larger companies that use a combination of tracks and live musicians or just tracks, and smaller companies that use condensed orchestrations with only live musicians. In other words, the size of the company isn’t always the deciding factor. Theatre companies have to consider two main elements when deciding which direction to take in this regard: real estate - do they have the space to accommodate musicians and their instruments? And unfortunately, funding - do they have enough support financially to pay musicians for their work? So, you will need to ask early on in your preparation for your gig as music director what you should expect as far as the band goes, as it can affect the way you prepare. If you know you will be working with all live musicians, then I recommend rehearsing with either a metronome or along with the original Broadway cast recording, *before* you ever meet with your musicians. You absolutely *must* be able to keep the proper tempo. There is nothing a dancer detests more than a band that is inconsistent with their tempos! And in your career as MD, whether you’re using tracks or not, even just a click track, you *will* be accused of altering the tempo. I know, I’ve been the accuser. Consider this a rite of passage as a music director and try not to take it personally. Remember, you will sometimes be playing the same show for months at a time, which means the actors will be playing the same role telling the same story for months. If there is a sleepy matinee where the

audiences' response is minimal, the show might feel like it's slogging along. I've even had moments as the MD and accompanist for a show where I double check to make sure the click track is working properly. If you are unfamiliar, a click track is essentially a pre-programmed metronome-like clicking track that the band plays along with during performances. Of course, only the band hears the click track in their in-ears, which are headphones that are hooked into the sound system by your sound designer that allow you to hear each other, the actors' microphones, and the tracks, if you're using them. Most setups also allow you to tailor how hot, or loud, you want each input. For example, as MD one of your duties is to be sure the actors are maintaining their vocal parts, keeping them tight and staying healthy, so you may want the mics to be louder than the brass section. You also want to be sure your percussionist is staying exactly on tempo with you/the tracks. Hearing them is typically not an issue, but depending on how noise canceling your headphones are their level may need to be adjusted, or you may want to lift one side of your headphones off, which I find more comfortable than having both ears covered. You may also have the option to adjust the levels of each ear individually, which is really lovely. Everyone has their own preference when it comes to the blend, so play around with this during tech week and find what works for you best.

If you are using tracks of any kind, then you must focus on advancing the tracks, meaning moving to the next track, and advancing through vamps and safeties seamlessly. Depending on your setup, you may do this with the space bar of your computer, a click of the mousepad, or some other type of external click pad. Another vital thing to rehearse is the changing of the keyboard patches, or the sounds your keyboard produces when you play it. If you remain on one patch for the entire show, then you can disregard this step, but do note that it will arise in your

future as a music director/accompanist for musical theatre, and it can get hectic! MTI and Concord Theatricals work with KeyboardTEK, which is a company that “has original keyboard programming for dozens of Broadway & off-Broadway shows using digital audio workstations, or DAWs, like Mainstage & Ableton, mimicking the exact programs often used on Broadway” (“Keyboardtek”). There are other digital audio workstations such as Logic Pro, QLab, Avid Pro Tools, all of which have been used for live theatre but are becoming less mainstream, and programs like Studio One, Audacity, Garageband, Reaper, FL Studio, and Studio One, which, along with the aforementioned programs, are versatile and often used for producing electronic music, R&B, hip-hop, pop, rock, classical, jazz, blues and folk, indie, punk, metal, ambient, and trap (Knight). Similar to the timeline of receiving your physical materials, you may also request to receive your digital materials, including patches and accompaniment tracks, up to a year in advance, and depending on your rehearsal needs, even earlier than that, by request.

If your theatre is using tracks, whether they are full or partial, then your pit size will most likely be condensed. If your theatre is not using tracks, what is their protocol for finding and hiring musicians? Does your show have any specific musical requirements? For example, a show like *Hairspray* will likely need a bass player and possibly a guitarist. If your theatre has the funding and the space, then you can have a musician on every book (bass, cello, drums, guitars 1 & 2, keyboard 1/piano/conductor, keyboard 2, keyboard 3, percussion, reed 1, reed 2, trombone, trumpet, violins 1 & 2) (“*Hairspray*”). If your theatre does not have these resources, then it may be your job to determine what books to leave out of your production. If your theatre is using partial tracks, find out what instruments are covered in those tracks and what live musicians you

will need to fill the rest of the sound. No matter the circumstance, having a conversation with the theatre is a must, as this decision is ultimately up to them.

As mentioned previously, one of the primary considerations when it comes to whether or not to use tracks is the actual physical space at your disposal. This also leads to another question that you and your fellow pit musicians may have when signing on for a new gig: where will you be playing for the performances? Every theatre is different; some have the traditional orchestra pit, while others can only spare a tight corner backstage, and depending on the musical you're doing, you may even be playing on stage. In an article for *Broadway World*, Cara Joy David says, "...Hoyt spends *On Your Feet!* in a closet-like room in the basement of the Marquis Theater with his keyboard and a drummer next door-the rest of the musicians are onstage and listen to his verbal cues through earpieces while he can watch via a monitor." Once you know where you'll be performing and rehearsing, be sure to let your band know. This is admittedly less pressing than communicating cue lines, especially if the band's location is on the traditional side. But if you find out you'll be on stage for performances, let them know as soon as you can so haircuts and the like can be scheduled accordingly. I jest, but you'll work with some particular people throughout your career!

There are a couple of last-minute variables I recommend addressing before rehearsals begin, if possible. The first one being whether or not you, the director, or the choreographer wish to make any changes to the material. But reader, beware! According to MTI, making adjustments "such as changing the gender of a character, changing the name of a town to give it local significance, adding songs that appeared in the movie version of the musical," violates "the author's rights under federal and international copyright law" ("Do's and Don'ts of Licensing").

In order to make any change or deletion of the written material you must first obtain written permission from the licensing company. If you do not, “not only can the director or producer who decided to change the work be held liable, but the entire production staff, cast and crew - even the owner of the building - can be held liable,” as this is a demonstration of “willful violation of copyright law” (“Do’s and Don’ts of Licensing”). The only way around this risk aside from obtaining permission from the licensing company is to choose works that are in the public domain. This would then include works that were published before 1923, works that went unpublished whose authors have been deceased for over 70 years, and any work by an anonymous author from over 120 years ago. Some popular theatrical pieces that are in the public domain would include plays written by William Shakespeare, Henrik Ibsen, Eugene O’Neill, George Bernard Shaw, and Oscar Wilde, and musicals or operettas by Gilbert and Sullivan.

The American Association of Community Theatre, Berklee School of Music, and Playbill all agree that the music director often plays a role in auditioning performers and providing casting recommendations to the artistic team. Find out if your theatre has already cast the show or if they’ll need you to attend and/or accompany auditions. If the show is already cast, then on day one of music rehearsals, you’ll need to find out what vocal parts your ensemble is accustomed to, and if your leads have the ability to sing their music in original keys. If you are not confident that they can master their music in the original key signatures within the rehearsal timeline, then you may opt to receive transpositions from the licensing company. Many scores already have alternate keys for certain problematic songs, but if yours doesn’t, reach out to your licensing representative. If you will be present for or accompanying the auditions, then be sure to have a few conversations with the director and choreographer beforehand so you know what they

envision for each character/what their wish list is, and then pay close attention to each actor's vocal range, style, etc. These conversations are a priority and should be negotiated early in your pre-rehearsal preparations.

Rehearsals

“To achieve great things, two things are needed; a plan, and not quite enough time.” -Leonard Bernstein (“Leonard Bernstein Quotes”)

Have you ever seen one of those kitschy graphic T-shirts that reads, “I can't, I have rehearsal”? Well, the saying was created for a very good reason. Rehearsals can be grueling, tedious, exhausting, inspiring, beautiful, full of discovery, and time consuming, while also feeling rushed and cut short. For example, I have performed and music directed with some tight schedules that essentially involved rehearsing a show for 1.5-2.5 weeks, having approximately 3.5 days of tech rehearsals, and then performing for an audience on the evening of the 4th day of tech. During that rehearsal time, the company owned us, as we were often there from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., only to go home afterwards to memorize or rehearse music or choreography so that the next time we touched on what we learned that day, we were ready for fine-tuning and detail work. Once the show was open, we performed between 7 and 10 times per week. If the theatre's season included a theatre for young audiences show, or TYA, most of that cast was comprised of actors from the mainstage production. So, the week after opening, we were back in rehearsal during our down time, including between shows on double show days. Once the TYA show was up and running, those of us who were involved in both that and the mainstage show performed doubles nearly every day of the week. Then (ready for this?) those of us who were part of the

next mainstage show were back in rehearsals in the mornings and between shows for that! Once the current mainstage show closed, which was usually on a Saturday evening, the crew would tear down the set late into the night so that tech for the next mainstage show could start the following afternoon or first thing Monday morning, rinse and repeat. Not every theatre designs their seasons this way. Some theatres run only seasonally, while others run year-round.

As music director, you will very likely be scheduling rehearsals with the band, so be sure to discuss their availability so you can best coordinate days and times. Depending on the difficulty of the show and your musician's abilities, I would advise between 2 and 4 rehearsals for just you and them. During this time, if not before, note any conflicts they might have with the performance schedule, and whether or not they will be using a sub. On the occasion a band member does have a conflict, they are typically responsible, in my experience, for finding a sub, supplying them with their instrument's book, and communicating notes or scheduling details. Each sub will need to fill out and return any necessary tax forms to the theatre so they are compensated properly. Before discussing subs with your band, talk with your theatre about their usual practices to be sure you follow suit. Also, talk to your stage manager about the rehearsal schedule with the actors, as they will want to know what you plan to work on each day during the rehearsal period.

The American Association of Community Theatre says that MDs are in charge of "helping cast members learn their music." Their verbiage suggests that the music director is only partially involved in the cast learning the score, which is rarely the case. In an ideal world, actors are masters of the craft of musical theatre and music theory and show up on day one of rehearsal with all materials memorized. If this were the case, they would only require some guidance with

regard to the vision or concept of the production, (as previously decided by the director). But what we find more frequently are actors who have little prior knowledge of music theory and need to be taught each line of the melody, and each nuance of the harmony by the music director, which is a fantastic opportunity to inspire the malleable actors toward the holistic vision of the production. The artistic team, so as not to waste precious rehearsal time, typically plans out the order of material to be rehearsed prior to day one. Every company's first day of school is structured differently, so try to keep your focus on what you have control of - your music rehearsals.

Once you step behind the piano for the first music rehearsal with the cast, you should already hear how you want the show to sound in your mind. Make sure that all direction you give to the actors guides them toward that vision. When I first began working as a music director, I didn't understand that concept. I put all my focus on learning the notes, rather than allowing that focus to shift to the big picture throughout the rehearsal. We actors need to be reminded, often more than once, that the cutoff is on 1 or that we need to drop our jaws for a more rounded "aw" sound as opposed to a bright "ah." If details like this are left for later in the rehearsal process, bad habits may have already set in and it may be too late to get from them exactly what you want. I ran into this situation when I served as MD for a middle school production of Roald Dahl's *Willy Wonka Jr.* I focused too much on the notes and didn't drill elements like cutoffs early enough in the rehearsal process. Working with children is obviously completely different from working with professional adults, and it was something I had very limited experience doing. But it was a very valuable lesson to learn as it's applicable to music rehearsals for persons of any age. When you buy a new piece of IKEA furniture, the box comes with assembly instructions,

right? There's always a step-by-step guide to putting the piece together, not just a picture of the finished product. Think about your music rehearsals this way. The little details all pieced together are what will create the sound you and the director want.

An invaluable tool for actors in rehearsals is a digital audio and/or video recorder (read: cell phone). The industry publication *Backstage* points out that "audiences are constantly being reminded to turn their phones off before they witness a performance," but that "one of the most convenient tools a cell phone can provide is the voice memo (or audio recording) function" (Ates). As a performer, I use my phone both for music and choreography rehearsals as a means for at home practice. Of course, these recordings remain either on my phone or in a private social media group that only other cast members and the artistic team can view. This is not a new practice, and I'm certain it's one that will be around for some time, so encourage your actors to record their vocal parts for practice outside of precious rehearsal hours. You won't regret it.

If you are new to music direction, then I would like to share some recommendations for the order of operations of your music rehearsals. Start with the musical numbers that involve the most members of the cast, and then zoom in from there. Chances are the larger numbers are the most challenging part-wise and will need the most work. As you move through each piece, have each vocal part record their notes as you plunk. Then rehearse the lines separately, then together, watching out for areas where more than one vocal part sings the same line. If you are an extraordinarily organized individual, consider creating a system of notating the vocal parts in your score so that if duplicate or repeat harmonies occur, they don't take you by surprise in rehearsals. Once you spend time with each individual part, play around with different pairings of parts, such as sopranos and basses, altos and baritones, etc. If you are a seasoned MD, then you

may have your own methods for navigating rehearsals, so by all means, do what works the best for you and your cast.

During rehearsals, there will be occasions where the director is working with the leads and your ensemble is free, or the choreographer is working with the ensemble and the leads are free - use this time. Ask them what they need. Are there moments in the show that are a cappella or are difficult rhythmically? Perhaps you can conduct these moments for the actors during performances. There may also be moments that, after receiving blocking or choreography, become challenging for the actors - ask them how you can help. Maybe there is a section in a dance number that is in the clear and it would be helpful for your percussionist to keep a cadence of some kind, or for you to keep a steady beat in the base line. As you become more experienced in this line of work, you begin to anticipate requests like this, which from the actor's perspective makes you look like a musical god. Be their advocate when it comes to all things music related, as this is the sort of preemptive action that will set you apart from other MDs and solidify your reputation.

Once the show is learned in its entirety, it's time for the designer run. This is a full runthrough of the show for all the designers involved, typically taking place in the rehearsal studio. For this rehearsal it is important that you, or the accompanist if you are serving just as MD, play as close to performance level as possible. The theatre may or may not ask the full band to play for this rehearsal; in my experience they typically don't, so you want to do what you can from the piano. It's possible you have already been doing this, and it's also possible you've been helping the actors by really punching harmonies, or playing them loudly, which is what rehearsal is for. But try to pull back from that for this rehearsal so you can see what adrenaline does to

their performances. You'll discover that the problem spots will either stick out or smooth out on this day. Either way, you'll know what needs a bit more work as you enter tech week. Oftentimes the percussionist will also play at this rehearsal, which offers the first opportunity for the lighting designer to note light cues in coordination with crashes and musical swells, which creates pure magic on stage. Live in the excitement of this rehearsal; it's the first time outside eyes are on the show. It might be the first time *you* feel like you *have* a show.

Tech Is Fun

The final step of rehearsing your production is tech week. As music director, your concentration now must include your band and the way all musical elements blend together. During these rehearsals, it could behoove you to occasionally step out of the pit and into the house of the theatre to listen to how the actors and their microphones are balancing out with the band and the tracks (if you're using them). Take some time to get to know your sound designer, as you will likely rely on them quite a bit at this time. They will assist in getting your musicians mic'd up, setting up in-ears, and the balance of your musicians and actors throughout the house. It is typically around this time that the sitzprobe rehearsal will occur, if your theatre company decides to have one. The term "sitzprobe" is German in origin and translates to "seated rehearsal" ("Sitzprobe"). This rehearsal is quite exciting as it is the first time the orchestra and the actors play and sing together. Keep in mind, as much as you may want to fix any issues that arise, this is not a vocal rehearsal. The purpose of a sitzprobe is for the band and cast to hear how their two elements fit together, it is not the time to stop and correct harmonies or give other

extraneous notes. Concentrate on timing and making sure the actors know when their vocal entrances are. Everything else can wait to be worked out during tech week.

Performance

“It’s the day of the show, ya’ll.” - *Waiting for Guffman*

By now, you’ve researched, practiced, rehearsed and finessed, and hopefully you and the cast and crew feel ready for an audience. Given the run goes smoothly, all that’s left for you to do is show up on time to the theatre for shows and maintain the integrity of the production, ensuring it remains consistent throughout the run. Enjoy yourself and enjoy the people you get to work with. Chances are this exact group will never work on a project together again.

CHAPTER TWO: INTRODUCTION

Music directing for a piece of musical theatre is a gift. For two hours, you get the opportunity to create pure joy for a group of eager audience members just hoping for some escapism. When I am sitting down in the pit, and I'm tucked in the middle of the music, and I look up at the actors who are breathing life into their characters and experiencing a new story, everything else in the world falls away and I feel like I'm underscoring living art. For me, leading a pit and a cast of actors feels deeply spiritual because it's offering an extraordinarily special oneness that is precious and should be cherished. I feel every emotion the actors do as they make their way through the show, I laugh at every joke, every performance, and it's truly honest laughter. There have been moments in my career where I've wept while playing and conducting because my heart is in my hands when I work.

In Chapter One, I covered the basics of music direction and accompaniment for musical theatre. We discussed the different types of musicals, responsibilities of the role of MD, how to prepare for rehearsals, what to expect during rehearsals and how to best use your time. In this chapter, my intention is to provide a deeper insight into this line of work by dissecting my philosophies on the best ways to train, the skill and personality traits I deem most important to develop and nurture, and how I survived various snafus that arose during my career.

Background and Training

Whether you are just embarking on your career as a music director or accompanist, or you are established and looking to broaden your scope of knowledge, you should never stop seeking additional training or new experiences. Actors are frequently told that to become better

actors they should go out and live life; see, hear, feel, touch, be in the world and around its people. This same idea easily applies to musicians. Music across the globe is diverse and special, and as musical theatre continues to open its arms to new styles, we in the artistic community should do the same. We should embrace change, regardless of our background and experience, and not shy away from what is new. One of your career goals should be to pursue a working knowledge of as many genres of music as you can. I also recommend, and, perhaps more importantly, that you know as much about as many different instruments as possible, including how to play them.

I was once offered a contract to play the piano for a production of *Ring of Fire*, a jukebox musical featuring music by the legendary Johnny Cash. My understanding of Johnny Cash's music up until this point was that it was all country, which was an unfamiliar genre to me, especially as an accompanist, but one I felt I could play without much of an issue. Then, as I began practicing the music and listening to his albums, I realized that he wrote in many different genres including rockabilly, blues, rock and roll, gospel and folk. Well, I had once music directed *Hairspray*, which is rock and roll, I had spent a couple years as a church pianist, so I had some familiarity with gospel, and as a female performer and pianist, how could I not be familiar with the incredible hit musical *Once*, which features folk-rock music. I felt equipped enough by my past experiences to accept the contract and play for the show. But when rehearsals rolled around, I was asked to play the accordion for a song, and learn (or learn to fake) how to play "I've Been Everywhere" on the guitar. Playing the accordion was close enough to playing the piano that I was able to learn the one song without a problem. The guitar on the other hand...; well, let's just say that I learned quickly how difficult it is to believably fake playing the guitar,

especially when lined up across the stage with five other people who were actually playing theirs.

But my recommendation of learning about other instruments isn't just for the purpose of playing them. As MD, you will be leading band rehearsals and giving notes to the musicians, and if you don't know that the alto saxophone is a transposing instrument, or what pieces are in a basic drum kit, then your communication with your band may suffer. Take the time to learn about elements such as these, as it will help you maneuver working with different instrumentalists throughout your career. Learn to speak their musical language so there are no barriers. This includes studying everyone's favorite subject, music theory.

Aside from your knowledge of different genres of music, instruments and music theory, your success in this line of work is directly correlated with your understanding of musical theatre. As I mentioned in Chapter One, you can be the most trained pianist in the world and struggle when faced with accompanying a musical, let alone serving as the music director. Have you ever heard the old adage, "A jack of all trades is a master of none"? This may apply to some lines of work, but have you ever heard the rest of the saying? "...But oftentimes better than a master of one" (Cook). Theatre professionals nowadays must at least be jacks of all trades, if not masters of many. Part of your job is research, and you can complete this research by attending theatre, concerts, movies, by taking instrumental, acting, vocal and dance lessons, by utilizing the internet and sites like YouTube. Grab any opportunity to learn more about every element of producing theatre as it can only help you. My training is in piano, voice, dance, acting, theatre, and I have experience running the light board, operating spot lights, working in the box office, choreographing, working as the dance captain, show captain, understudy, lead, ensemble,

accompanist, sub, music director - I have a deep understanding of how musical theatre works because of these experiences. Don't box yourself in. Don't put limits on yourself. There is always more you can learn, and more ways to improve.

Skill Sets and Personality Traits

If you are considering a future in which you are a music director, there is a particular set of skills and personality traits that it is imperative you develop. In his blog, Peter Hilliard mentions the importance of being a good reader and listener. I have a lot to say about both of these, as they are two of the most important skills a music director and musical theatre accompanist should have. Now, by being a good reader, Hilliard isn't talking about how well you can read a book, he's referencing how well you can read sheet music. More specifically, how well you can sight read. Listen closely, reader, sight reading is vital if you wish to truly excel at music direction, and even more so if you plan to be a pit/rehearsal accompanist or sub. The absolute best way I have found to practice this skill is to play any and every piece of sheet music that you can get your hands on. Play it all. And don't necessarily spend a lot of time on each piece either. The point is not to practice it until it's correct; the point is to get used to playing, or reading, new material. The goal is to be able to play anything more or less correctly the first time you lay eyes on it. You can be the most magnificent, classically trained pianist, but if you cannot sight read, I guarantee you will not be able to accompany a vocalist or sub for a show at the last minute. When I was pursuing my bachelor's degree, I was in a Musical Theatre Repertoire and on this particular day we were doing mock auditions for a made-up season at a professional theatre. Well, our usual accompanist was out sick that day, so my professor had invited a

graduate music major in to sub for her. The first couple of students sang their songs with the sub accompanist and the grad student's playing was disastrous. Songs that should have been bubbly and upbeat were played as somber ballads; it was a mess. I began to think the entire thing was a setup and my professor was looking to see how we would handle having an audition pianist who couldn't play - until my professor beckoned me over to him. "Do you think you could handle playing for the rest of the class?" And so I did.

A few years after this I received a call on a Wednesday afternoon from the artistic director of a theatre I'd performed at in Pennsylvania. "We need an immediate replacement for [our music director]." She flew me up there the following afternoon, I shadowed the current MD that evening, and on Friday night I played, ran partial tracks and conducted their production of *The Music Man*. My hands were visibly shaking, but I made it through that night and the remaining weeks successfully. If you ever find yourself in a similar position, the most important thing to do is request a video recording of the production you're about to sub for. Seth Rudetsky discusses in his article "In the Pits: My Life As a Broadway Musical Understudy," that in order to make subbing on Broadway work you have to play along with a tape of the show at home, calling this technically illegal practice "an open secret." That's precisely what I did to prepare for *The Music Man*; I practiced along with the video recording. When doing this, be sure to eyeball all the cue lines for song entrances, vamps and safeties, and make sure they are all legible. If there are any visible cues, study the video closely. Work moments that have sudden tempo changes, as well as any solo sections. Since you may not have time to drill and rehearse the show, mark anything that you may forget. Muscle memory is a skill you may not be able to rely on in a subbing situation, so where you might not usually circle accidentals or dynamic

markings, consider doing so. Keep in mind, in situations where you are subbing for a musical, you are like the understudy for the hired musician or music director. Your job is to fill their shoes so completely that nothing musically feels different. This is not your opportunity to take artistic liberties or make your own choices. The choices for the show have been made and set; it's not your show.

Now, what about a situation where you have even less time to prepare? I once subbed on keyboard 1 for a production of *SHOUT! The Mod Musical* with six hours notice, and this is what I did: I obtained the score, searched YouTube for a cast recording (none to be found), I searched each individual song and played along, and then I met with the other three musicians at the theatre to run a few tricky parts, ran a song or two with the cast and then it was show time. I leaned on the percussionist for setting tempos and we made it through without a hitch. It's imperative to silence your inner critic and trust your musical theatre intuition. Remind yourself that you are experienced, and this experience is fueling your intuition. Trust yourself. Ignore your second guesses. Let your hands get to work.

So, you're a good reader, but what does it mean to be a good listener? It's having the ability to hear when one tenor in an ensemble of 35 isn't rounding out his vowel on a particular note near the top of his range and he's causing a bit of a splat where everyone else is producing sound that is nice and full and rounded. It's hearing when the guitar 2 player is playing a chord that's causing a brief dissonance with the clarinet part (only to realize the guitar 2 book has a mistake). It's jamming to the original recording of "Waving Through a Window" from *Dear Evan Hansen* and hearing that between 2:13-2:14 there is a beep in the recording, an A9 I believe, that clearly shouldn't be there. (Go have a listen on YouTube, you'll hear it in your left

ear.) It's more than just hearing mistakes though. It's also hearing expression and confidence (or lack thereof), it's experiencing the unity of instruments and voices while noting their individuality, hearing vocal placement, and understanding what is happening and how to fix what needs to be fixed. Which leads right into the next very important ability: the ability to teach.

In Cara Joy David's *Broadway World* article, she also stated that music directors have to be excellent teachers, "...less public school teacher and more private group tutor." What tickles me about this, and it's absolutely true by the way, is that my entire life I've told anyone and everyone that I have no interest in teaching! It's not for me. But that's exactly what you're doing as MD. And I love her use of the word "tutor" because part of teaching the material to the actors is figuring out how to "reach" them, as she says, having the intuition to know what you need to say or do that leads them to their ah-ha moment. When I was a budding pianist, I struggled with understanding what the bottom number of the time signature meant. Over and over my teachers told me, "the bottom number is the note that gets the beat." Gets the beat. *What* beat? Their tactic, if you will, of repeating the same words to me, didn't work! Go figure. It wasn't until someone finally said, "the bottom number is the note that gets ONE beat" that it finally made sense! The relief I felt brought tears to my eyes then and it still does to this day. It was one of the most exciting moments I've ever had as a student. As MD you must be able to identify where your cast is with their understanding of theory, musicality, their acting, and then figure out how to communicate with them on their level. This teacher adapted to me as their student, which is another very important soft skill for you to develop.

Strong adaptability requires strong reality acceptance and excellent problem-solving skills. There will be moments as a music director where you are faced with an obstacle that cannot immediately be resolved, and you must figure out a way forward that allows the show to go on, and quickly and safely. Shortly after stepping into the pit for *The Music Man*, our incredible percussionist, we'll call him "B," experienced a medical emergency during the first act of a matinee and had to leave the pit. We finished the act, and I found the stage manager during intermission to get an update on B, and to figure out how to finish the show without him. You see, we had just made it through the percussion-heavy "Marian The Librarian" without B, and the end of the show was coming, which saw the entire cast march on stage single file with their trombones to a cadence on the drums. All of a sudden, I'm surrounded by cast members and our stage manager and they're all looking to me for the answer to what we're going to do in lieu of that cadence. "Oh, this is my decision, isn't it?" People were throwing out suggestions left and right and the one that made the most sense to me came from an uber talented dancer in the ensemble, the gentleman who leads the march. He acted as the drum major and kept a cadence with a whistle. Using a whistle isn't unheard of in marching band, and it was something I was sure the whole cast would be able to hear. It worked splendidly. But sometimes the fix won't be so stellar. I ended up sticking around as interim music director for the next two shows after *The Music Man*, one of which was George and Ira Gershwin's *Crazy For You*. We were early in tech week, and I was playing and running the partial tracks while the choreographer spaced through "I Got Rhythm" with the cast. Suddenly, the tracks stopped working. We held for five minutes while the sound designer and I tried to reboot the system, but to no avail. Then I hear, "can you just play it?" If you are unfamiliar, this song is the huge tap number at the end of the first act,

and it is deceptively difficult to “just play.” I tried a few times to make it through, but ended up messing it up so badly that, defeated, I threw my hands up in the air and just told everyone I needed a minute. I went to the restroom and had myself a mini pity party, cried about it, and quickly got myself back to the pit to continue the rehearsal - with bells on. Moments like that will happen and that’s okay. We are human. But you still have to wrap the moment up to unpack later on, if need be, so that you can remain present and focused on the task at hand.

Serving as music director requires that you not only be a trustworthy leader, but also a team player who can at least manage, and ideally thrive in collaboration with others. The artistic team, specifically the director, music director and choreographer, should feel like a singular unit of equals, each governing their assigned aspect of the show in accordance with the vision set forth by the director. Please note the keyword of that description is “equals”; it just so happens that the director is the one to devise the concept or vision of the show. This can go to people’s heads. A word to the wise, you will run into directors (even choreographers, or the director/choreographer combo) who are of the mindset that it’s their way or the highway. These folks will either steal your ideas and pass them off as their own or shoot them down as though they were criticisms or were somehow going to work against the direction of the show. Just remind yourself that there is always a reason people are the way they are. Do your best to keep your focus on the work and not on any off-stage drama that might be occurring. And regardless of who you work with and how collaborative they are or aren’t, you must remain professional and diplomatic.

The final trait I’d like to discuss is organization. When people are asked if they consider themselves organized, a wave of guilt tends to pass across their face. No one wants to admit

they're not, but they have a hard time saying that they are. I don't care how messy your desk is or if you refer to your closet as a "doom room," (like I do), the most important form of organization for a music director is time management. How you spend each moment of a music rehearsal for a show is very important as time is usually limited. And please don't expect to nail this immediately; allow yourself some grace, as guesstimating the amount of time it will take you to teach a number of songs depends almost entirely on how quickly your cast can learn it. Be prepared by knowing what your goal is each day and keep an eye on the rehearsal schedule as it can frequently change.

How I Do Things

In Chapter One I discussed the different types of musicals, responsibilities of a music director, how to prepare for a new gig as music director before rehearsals begin, how to maneuver rehearsals, tech, and the run of a show. Now I'd like to provide my own subjective take on some of those topics, and how I arrived at my current way of thinking, starting with what it means to be a music director. To be frank, this is often a thankless job, even with the Tony Awards not giving a "Best Music Director" award. You would think that if the role is necessary to produce the Tony Awards itself, it would be a category eligible for an award. MDs are often left off playbills and programs or appear in very small font as an apparent afterthought. I've even seen productions without any kind of acknowledgement to their band in the curtain call. If you want your name in lights, given the current state of things, this is not the job for you.

If you don't mind occasionally being overlooked and you feel passionately about this line of work - wonderful. Welcome. Let's get into some gritty details. In Chapter One I mentioned

briefly the importance of implementing elements like cutoffs early in the rehearsal process. This applies to other details like dynamics, tonal quality, acknowledging luftpauses, breathing, dialect, diction, inflection, consonants and clarity. All these elements, in a professional setting, should be treated almost equally as important as the notes themselves. I find it helpful to walk through a song with the actors and point out moments of importance and have them mark their librettos before learning a single note of it. Have them mark their librettos. I strongly suggest you require from day one that each cast member bring a pencil with them to rehearsal. I also strongly suggest that you bring a box of pencils with you from day one because, well, you understand.

When you are teaching parts, whether it be for the ensemble or the leads, keep in mind the circumstances of the song within the story of the show. Cara Joy David stated, “MDs can’t just seek the perfect sound, they also need to be conscious of character development.” I personally view this to be more important than tonal quality and perfection. Consider the song “A Little Fall Of Rain” from *Les Miserables*. If Eponine lay dying in Marius’ arms, and their voices were rich and full and strong during this song, it would be comedic. My suspension of disbelief? On lunch break. This song is completely tragic and utterly gut wrenching. The acting must outshine the singing. There, I’ve said it. This music director believes the acting is more important than the singing. In that moment, I don’t care what they sound like, as long as they are being honest to their characters and to the story. I want to hear the pain in his voice, the fear, the pleading. With Eponine, we have to hear her fade away and become weak. Dig into the drama of a moment like this and find the realism. When discussing this opinion with colleagues in the past, they’ve mentioned the needs of the audience, saying that people don’t want to pay top dollar for imperfection. But I think this argument makes a hasty generalization about audiences

and is overly simplistic. They attend musicals for an experience. They want to feel something. If the scene is emotional, then a crack in the actor's voice may be the best way to create that experience. Perfection is boring and predictable. And as long as an actor can do it safely, I want to hear the crack in their voice when they're wrought with emotion. I want to hear the bleakness, the heaviness, the grief. Save perfection for the opera.

When I first joined the pit of *The Music Man* as the sub MD, I had never run tracks for a show, I had never conducted, and I had certainly not ever played in the pit for a professional show. All my training and experience as a pianist and performer culminated in this moment. My inner critic was getting louder as I considered the unreasonable expectations of the situation. I'd never been in this situation, I was overwhelmed, and I was uncertain. I attribute my success to the incredible support I received from the band, cast, and crew, and to the power of observation. By this time in my career, I had been performing professionally for 10 years, and being a pianist, I was naturally drawn to the music directors I worked with. I watched them closely as they worked, teaching the music, giving notes to the cast, what types of notes they gave (meaning what they listened for, what was important to them), I picked up on their mannerisms and behaviors, how they marked their scores, how they counted the cast or band into a song, how they conducted, how they cut off the ensemble at the end of a phrase. Those 10 years prepared me for this moment more than I had realized, especially with conducting and how I communicated with the band. If you're ever in a situation where you just really aren't sure what you're doing, and as long as no one's life is at risk, fake it until you make it. And the key to selling this is confidence. The night I shadowed the current MD, I watched how and when he conducted the band and cast, who he cued, even with what hand. (Music directors for musical

theatre who are also accompanying the show are not able to use a baton the way conductors of a symphony do. Typically, you will be playing more often than you are conducting. So, thankfully that was something I didn't have to concern myself with.)

When conducting, I find that the most important thing to nail consistently is the downbeat, or first beat, of each measure. Let's say you are conducting a song that is in 4/4, or common time, meaning there are 4 beats per measure and the value of the quarter note is 1 beat. The shape that you're aiming to trace in the air is similar to a ship's anchor, and the pattern begins by tracing down on beat 1, in toward your body on beat 2, away from your body on beat 3, and back up where you started on beat 4. This pattern applies if you're using one or both hands: down on beat one, in toward your body on beat 2, away from your body on beat 3, and back up on beat 4. If the song you are conducting is in 3/4, beat 1 is down, 2 is away from the body, and beat 3 is back up. So, your left hand is creating a backwards "L" and your right hand is creating a regular "L." For easier understanding, please see figure X. This is a very basic crash course on how to conduct the beats of a measure. Every conductor has their own style; some are more rigid with movement coming mostly from their wrists, while others are more expressive, using their whole upper body. What I find particularly enjoyable about conducting is the opportunity for expressivity, as I enjoy employing my entire upper body, when appropriate. Just be sure the beats are clear and consistent.

Steven J. Morrison, from the University of Washington, Seattle, et al., conducted a study (no pun intended) for the *Journal of Research in Music education* that "examined whether a conductor's use of high-expressivity or low-expressivity techniques affected evaluations of ensemble performances that were identical across conducting conditions" (Morrison, et al.).

What they found was fascinating. Audiences bore witness to two [unknowingly] identical performances by a symphony, once with a highly expressive conductor, and once with a minimally expressive conductor. Their “results indicate that the expressivity of the conductor had a significant and powerful bearing on how listeners judged the expressivity of a music performance” (Morrison, et al.). This finding may not hold much significance in musical theatre as the conductor and band are frequently hidden from the audience. But, in 2000, Morrison cites a study by House which indicated that “individual trumpet performances...in response to a videotaped expressive conductor were rated more expressive than performances in response to a nonexpressive conductor” (Morrison, et al.). What this means is that the trumpet players were judged to be playing more expressively when their conductor himself was highly expressive. How exciting! This concept when applied to conducting for musical theatre could have a huge impact on the experiences of the audience, actors, and fellow musicians. After all, one of your goals for an evening of theatre is for the audience to fully enjoy what you’ve produced, and for the actors and musicians to give everything they have. I can presume from this study that the odds of meeting this goal depend largely on you and how much you’re willing to give to them.

You will run into moments where there are dramatic tempo changes in the music, and these moments can get sloppy if they’re not controlled properly. Clear, rigid conducting comes in handy here, as does using your head and nodding to show the change. If you’re facing a *ritardando* or *rallentando*, a gradual slowing of the tempo, or a *ritenuto*, a sudden slowing of the tempo, it can be helpful to subdivide your conducting, which means rather than conducting just the 4 beats in a 4/4 measure, you’d conduct on the “rhythmic points in between the beats” as well (“Subdividing the Beat”). So instead of tracing one anchor for the measure with the slower

tempo, you'd trace two. If there is an *accelerando*, or an increase in tempo, and you are conducting, I find that animating your conducting in a lively way communicates the change fairly well. It will certainly draw your band's attention, especially if it's a big tempo increase. Remember, we're having fun with this work, too! If the tempo is very fast, you may then switch to feeling it in cut time, or 2/4, conducting with just a "down up." If both of your hands are on the keys, then nodding your head on beats 1 and 3 (if you're in 4/4 time) or just on beat 1 (if you're in 3/4 time) will make the new tempo clear. Then move into communicating *accel.* And *ritards.*

As discussed in Chapter One, advancing through vamps and safeties is something you must be able to communicate clearly with your band and the actors. Let's say you are vamping during dialogue with one hand playing the same two measures until the cue to move on. Hold up your other hand, just enough to be visible by those who need to see it, and when it's time to move on, give a gesture as you bring your hand back down to the keys. This gesture can be a point, a circle, a "chop," as long as it is active and clear. When I do this, I also nod my head with the gesture. Be sure that you don't move too much right before giving the cue, that way there is no confusion. (This also applies when you're about to establish a new tempo.) If the vamp or safety requires both hands on the keys, then a big, intentional head nod will suffice. When you do move on past the vamp or safety, be sure to finish them out, rather than just jumping past it.

In this same vein, I want to remind you that as MD and/or accompanist, you are part of a huge team of individuals who, for lack of better wording, are all in it together. The best MDs nurture their relationships with everyone around them, rather than just going through the motions. If you're about to start a huge, taxing dance number, show the actors that you're there

with them, that you're present, connect with them. When I served as MD for *Crazy For You*, I remember deliberately scanning the ensemble, looking at each actor, smiling and doing "give me" hands to them before starting "I Got Rhythm." It was my way of communicating, "let's go, let's do it - together" to everyone. Similarly, if the actors were in the midst of a dramatic scene, I tried to give them privacy. I was intentional about not moving around too much, not playing on my phone, or whispering to the other band members.

The last tip I feel is important to cover is what to do in the event an actor gets off from the pit (e.g., they miss an entrance in a song and start singing late, or they jump an entrance after a vamp and are ahead of the music). Depending on your situation, there are a couple of ways to respond. If you are in a smaller sized, all live pit, then it might be safe for you to have the other musicians stop playing momentarily while you find where the actor is in the music. When you find the spot, continue playing with them and communicate the measure number to the rest of the musicians so they can jump back in. Ideally, this happens very quickly, and you never stop playing something. If you're playing with tracks of any kind, stopping them is almost never going to be an option as it would be far too conspicuous. Similarly, if you are playing with a large band, having them stop would be just as disruptive. In these situations, your best option will likely be to just keep going and let the singer figure it out. As an accompanist, this goes against everything in your training, because all you want to do is help them and jump to where they are. But when you're playing with other musicians, that is not always a viable option as it could lead to cacophony and confusion. This is because the music that the other musicians are using does not have the lyrics in it, only the main piano part does. You might immediately know where the singer is because you can see the words they're singing, but you're the only one who

will know. The best way to prevent this type of mishap is to provide reference points to the musicians where there are difficult vocal entrances. For instance, if there is a vocal entrance that is supposed to occur after a vamp, and the actor who sings it starts singing early (before you're done playing the vamp), and this happens a couple times during rehearsals, note the first word or two that they sing and tell your band where it lines up in the music. That way, if they hear those words happen early, they'll know to jump to that measure and continue playing from there. Moments like this are scary and nerve wracking, but with experience and thorough preparation, you'll know how to respond efficiently.

CONCLUSION

Music direction for musical theatre is no simple task. Extensive training and preparation are required for your work to surpass the basic needs of the role. I encourage you to push yourself toward a high, though achievable, standard, and to never stop learning. There is always something new to discover that will aid you in your career, whether it be a new language, instrument, skill, composer, author, spiritual practice, book, or song, they can all teach you something you didn't know before. Observe and absorb. It is this very concept that incited my interest in pursuing this master's degree program. I wanted to arm myself with additional knowledge for my future in this line of work, and my coursework provided. I have noticed multiple improvements in the way I work and my understanding of the craft that are a direct result of my time in this program. But there are two specific topics that have had the biggest impact – how to teach voice for musical theatre and directing for musical theatre. Having the ability to clearly communicate with actors and singers is extremely important as a music director and learning about the different elements of the voice and vocal placement has given me a deeper understanding of the mechanics of singing and broadened my vocal vocabulary. I have found it easier to explain my needs to singers, because I am now more able to hear what they're doing vocally. Similarly, I now have a greater insight into directing for musical theatre, which has helped the way I communicate acting needs to actors during music rehearsals. It has also helped me think more like a director, allowing an opportunity for connection with directors I work with in the future. All roads have led me to better communication.

To review, when you first begin preparing for a new gig as music director, research, practice and explore. Learn the style, the setting of the story, historical information, the writers'

backgrounds and their other works. Immerse yourself in the world of the show. Connect with the director and choreographer of the show; get to know them and begin discussing the director's vision for the show. Open a line of communication with the theatre company you've been hired by and ask them what is expected of you as the new addition to their creative team. This small step could be what inspires them to rehire you for future productions.

Throughout the rehearsal process, pay close attention to the needs of the cast, director and choreographer. Do what you can to be a step ahead of requests such as providing accompaniment recordings, whether they're from the licensing company, or you've made them yourself. When you're teaching music to the cast, have them record their vocal part and request that they practice at home. Teach the details of the music early and often. Variables such as dynamics, cutoffs, consonants and vowels should be set in stone from the first rehearsal a piece is taught. Make sure to meet the cast where they are in their understanding of music theory, and always ask how you can help them.

As the cue lines for song entrances, vamps and safeties are solidified, be sure to note them and provide a list to your fellow pit musicians. Also include reference points for song lyrics, including their corresponding song and measure number, if you wish. This is an excellent way to save rehearsal time that would otherwise be spent talking through each of the items on this list.

During tech week and the sitzprobe rehearsal, listen for timing and blend. You want to make sure that all song and vocal entrances are confident and clear, and that the ensemble and band sound like one cohesive unit. Befriend the sound designer and ask them for assistance if you feel something sounds off.

I challenge you to find ways to keep each performance fresh, while remaining consistent. Cherish your time as music director and accompanist because as mentioned previously, each production is a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

GLOSSARY

Accompanist: A [piano] accompanist is the person who plays on the piano a piece of music that supports the main performer, the focal point of the performance. This performer could be another musician, a vocal soloist, a dancer, or an entire ensemble of singers and/or dancers. The accompanist provides the accompaniment. [[Back](#)]

Diaphragmatic Breathing: Also called belly breathing, this technique involves intentionally compressing the diaphragm, “the major muscle of respiration” down, allowing the lungs to take in more air (“Diaphragm and Lungs”). When completed correctly, diaphragmatic breathing feels like you’re breathing down into your abdomen, rather than only to your chest or lungs. By breathing in this manner, vocal and breath control improve (“How To Sing From Your Diaphragm...”).

Drum Kit: The basic setup for a typical drum kit includes two tom-toms, a floor tom, a bass drum, and a snare drum (“The Drum Kit - A Collection of Percussion Instruments.”). There is no set standard and every percussionist’s setup will vary, but the five pieces above are typically the basics upon which additional pieces are added. [[Back](#)]

Instrument 1/2/3: Every musical is written for a specific number of musicians, which sometimes means there is more than one musician on certain instruments. Each musician hired for a musical has their own instrument book, and no two musicians, even if they’re playing the same instrument, will be playing the same thing for the entire show. Thus, the labeling of their books will be different, e.g., keyboard 1, keyboard 2, guitar 1, guitar 2, etc. [[Back](#)]

Libretto: The actor's tool in musical theatre. The libretto is the book that contains the lyrics and musical notes of a show. Many times it also will include the written dialogue or script of the show, in performance order. [[Back](#)]

Luftpause: Also referred to as a breath mark, the luftpause is a large comma that appears in sheet music to signify the place in a phrase that the composer prefers the vocalist or musician to breathe ("Breath Mark"). [[Back](#)]

Measure or bar: Master Class defines the measure or bar as, "When a composer writes a symphony or song, they break down the piece of music into more manageable subdivisions. The smallest of those subdivisions are known as musical measures or musical bars" ("Learn About Measure in Music..."). It is a "single unit of time featuring a specific number of beats played at a particular tempo" ("Learn About Measure in Music..."). This allows the performer of the music to concentrate on one little bit of it at a time. [[Back](#)]

Orchestra versus band: In musical theatre it is common to use these terms interchangeably. However, in the classical music sense there is a distinction between the two: an orchestra is comprised of strings, woodwinds, brass, and percussion, and a band is brass, percussion, and woodwinds. [[Back](#)]

Pit: When we think of the pit of a theatre, we tend to imagine a recessed space between the stage and the front row of seats. This is historically the place where the orchestra or band performs the music for the production, and the place where the MD or conductor conducts the musicians and performers. There are situations where the MD and the conductor are not the same person. This will typically occur at the highest level of performance (e.g., Broadway, West End). [[Back](#)]

Put-in Rehearsal: When an actor has to call out of a show, meaning they cannot perform for a certain performance, a put-in rehearsal is held in order to *put* their understudy or swing *in* the show. Reasons an actor may need to call out of a show are few, and mostly have to do with illness (especially COVID-19), weddings (their outage would be approved prior to their hiring), funerals for immediate family, or injury. This rehearsal is usually run by the stage manager, who sometimes has help from the dance captain, show captain, or music director. [[Back](#)]

Safety: Like a vamp, safeties are placed in strategic places in the score and are repeated on an as needed basis. They are typically shorter in length and often played through only once. Cues to advance through a safety can be more unpredictable than cues for a vamp, such as audience response (laughter or applause), or lack thereof. [[Back](#)]

Score: The noun “score” can be in reference to a couple of different things. According to musicaldictionary.com, “it can mean any kind of sheet music... More narrowly, it can describe the ‘full score,’ or a single musical document that contains all the different parts for an orchestral performance.” I view the score as the musical document containing the parts for the orchestra or band of the musical, as well as the vocal or sung parts. The score is essentially the MD’s Bible. It tells them every bit of musical information they need to know about a production. The verb to score something, musically, means to compose the music, to score the show/movie. [[Back](#)]

Segue: (SEG · way) In music, to segue means to continue to the next section without pause. You’ll see this frequently at the end of a song that coincides with the end of a scene. Keep your hands on your instrument and watch your conductor! Oftentimes there will be a beat for applause, but be prepared for those matinee days where the audience is sleepy and responds minimally. [[Back](#)]

Sheet music: The written musical notations of a composed piece. This term is frequently used interchangeably with the score. [\[Back\]](#)

Sight Reading: This is the practice of playing a piece of music without having seen or practiced it before. When I use the term sight reading it is from the perspective of the piano accompanist; however, sight singing refers specifically to this same practice as a vocalist. Essentially, if an individual is a strong sight reader or sight singer, they can look at a piece of sheet music and either play or sing what is on the page with great precision - at first sight. [\[Back\]](#)

Transcription: Transcription is “writing out a piece of music for an instrument for which it was not originally written” (Miron). In musical theatre, transcription work happens almost exclusively with new works and in partnership with the writers and composers. If a musical is still being workshopped, meaning it has not yet opened on Broadway, and an actor adds a riff that the artistic team likes, the MD might be asked to put their pen to the paper and transcribe it, or write out the notes that the actor sang. [\[Back\]](#)

Transposing Instruments: An “instrument that produces a higher or lower pitch than indicated in music written for it.” Sheet music for these instruments “shows the relative pitches, rather than the exact pitches” it produces (“Transposing Musical Instrument”). This means that when a transposing instrument plays the written middle C, the instrument is not producing a middle C. Examples of transposing instruments include clarinets, English horn, and saxophones. [\[Back\]](#)

Vamp: A vamp is a section of music as short as a single beat or as long as an entire phrase that is designed to be repeated until a certain cue occurs. This cue can be in the form of dialogue, choreography or staging, lighting, sound (sound effects, or SFX for short), etc. [\[Back\]](#)

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