The “American Musical”, as it has evolved over the last century, has become a remarkable model of interdisciplinary practice. From its early iterations and influences in burlesque, vaudeville, and operetta to the complex contemporary amalgams of book, music, lyrics, and dance – the American musical has proven a rich crucible for the exploration of identity and culture, form and content, and ideas and emotions.

This arts workshop will offer actors a technical foundation for acting in musical theater. We will deal broadly with the history of musical theater in context, by exploring both the process by which actors engage with musical material and the development and aesthetics of the form. Participants will work on songs and scenes taken from the giants of musical theater including: Rogers & Hammerstein, Stephen Sondheim, and more.

How do we merge the receiving nature of acting with the giving nature of singing? How do we “justify” the decision to sing at all? Our survey of the evolution of musical theater will ask: what does the history of the American musical tell us about our cultural history? What do musicals teach us about the interdisciplinary nature of living in the arts?

All students in this course must be comfortable and confident singing actors. Everyone will be required to rehearse outside of class time, complete written and analytical assignments (2-3 short papers and bi-monthly journals), and commit to a public presentation at the end of the semester.

Readings:

We expect that before you perform your songs in class you will research the original context of the songs by reading the original script, or if that is unavailable, a detailed synopsis. You may absolutely choose an interpretation that is different from the original intent, but you can't skip the step of understanding the context for which it was first written.

**Calendar**

September 10 – Intros, Themes, “A Song I Love”

September 17 – 16 Bars, “Worth Singing About?”

September 24 – 16 Bars continued, possible group work.

October 1 – Intro to Rogers & Hammerstein  
Speed of thought, “suspension”, personalization

October 8 – *Rodgers & Hammerstein* – group work and songs  
Connecting to the lyric, letting the music “in”, shifting modes

October 15 - Columbus Day holiday – no class

October 22 – *Rodgers & Hammerstein* – group work and songs  
Thinking and talking, discovery

October 29 – *Stephen Sondheim* – group work and songs  
Finding the size, physical choices, engaging “us”

November 5 – *Stephen Sondheim* – group work and songs  
Taking in your partner, shared breath, listening  
(Possible visit to Fiasco Theater workshop)

November 12 – A group number!  
Landing sound, group movement?  
(Possible visit to Fiasco Theater workshop)

November 19 – Contemporary songs  
Uniting voice and movement, what about character?

November 26 – Contemporary songs continued  
Gotta…dance?

December 3 – Rehearse final song presentation…putting it together.

December 7 or 10 – FINAL PRESENTATIONS!
Attendance

You must attend every class. Be ready to work. Be fired up. Care. Be willing to try something and fail: you will learn something if you risk and fail, you will learn nothing if you don't. Watch and listen attentively and actively. Support each other. Theater is a collaborative thing – we are all in it together. You must attend every class to get an A for your final grade.

Clothes

You must wear appropriate rehearsal clothes to class. This means clothing you can move comfortably in, and don’t mind getting sweaty/dirty/etc. Please do not wear tight jeans or skirts.

Grading

Grades in this class will be based on attendance, attitude, passion, and participation (see above). No one will be evaluated on “talent”, whatever that means. Your talent should not be your concern, and it certainly won’t be our concern. Being "good" is not the goal. Being brave, bold and honest are the goals. You will be penalized one half grade for every class you miss (barring exceptional circumstances.) If you miss class due to illness, you may bring us a doctor's note and we will take it into consideration but it does not guarantee that you will not be penalized for the absence. You must attend every class in order to get a final grade of A. Participation is essential. You are expected to observe closely and generously, and to contribute meaningfully to class discussions at least twice every class.

Academic Integrity

Students in this seminar will be expected to uphold the high standards of academic integrity outlined for all NYU students in your handbook. Plagiarism of any kind is strictly prohibited, and will result in a failing grade, and subsequent punitive action by the Gallatin School.

Using NYC as a Resource

One of the main intentions for this course (and one of the main missions of Gallatin and NYU) is that you make New York City your oyster. Studying acting and musical theater in New York is an embarrassment of riches (though sometimes just an embarrassment), so take advantage of all the institutions, resources, and people that are available to you.

Some of these include:

The Performing Arts Library. Get a NYC library card if you don't already have one and check out the Performing Arts Library at Lincoln Center. Song index, archival videos, albums.

Student Rush Tickets and tdf.org Get cheap tickets and see as much as you can. Begin thinking critically about how and why you did or didn't enjoy the show or