

## American Musical Theatre, 1900-1943

### **Course Information:**

No texts or preparation needed.

### **Overview:**

The course is about the development of musical “entertainments,” which were based on popular tastes of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, into the quintessential Broadway musical. From 1900 until 1943, these entertainments included many separate forms such as Viennese operetta, ballet, spectacles, extravaganzas, vaudeville, revues and, most significantly, with the input of new American composers (all, ironically, of European heritage), an emerging, uniquely American form that united theme with music, dance and the spoken word. Because of the breadth of the topic, the course will focus on a chronological survey of key musical and historical events and composers responsible for the shift from European popular music exemplified in operettas to the uniquely American phenomenon of the 1943 Broadway production of *Oklahoma*.

### **Syllabus:**

In the first class we will listen to and discuss music from the early 1900's. Our discussion will center on the compositions of Lehar, Herbert, Cohan, Friml and Romberg, all of which have a European flavor.

In subsequent classes we will listen to music representative of the movement away from operetta, as Jerome Kern and Irving Berlin arrived on the scene, and we will discuss their exploration, in their youthful work, of ideas of intimacy and structure.

In the 1920's the major talents of Cole Porter, the Gershwin's, Hammerstein, Youmans and Rodgers and Hart entered the scene. We will listen to a range of their music, but will focus our discussion on Jerome Kern's *Showboat*, the only work of the period that offered a book, lyrics and music that were both mature and noble.

Between the production of *Showboat* in 1927 and the early 1940's, the American musical theater comprised a potpourri of styles, subject matters, music and lyrics, evolving toward an amorphous concept of unifying story with music, lyrics and dance. In several classes, we will listen to and discuss many recordings from this period, highlighting the growing sophistication of the shows and the development of stronger sound, both vocal and orchestral, as the tradition of “belting out the show tune” established itself.

The course will culminate with excerpts from significant Broadway shows of the early 1940's, especially *Oklahoma*; discussion will focus on the breakthrough it represented, not only for Rodgers and Hammerstein, but for the entire American musical theatre. Finally, in the last class, a surprise – a special compilation of musical numbers from stage and screen that, in my estimation, are once-in-a-lifetime experiences.

**Leader:** Gordon A. Jacoby, PhD, has taught speech for the stage and dialects to actors for many years.

**Tuesday:** 1:00 to 3:00 p.m., 8 weeks: September 26 through November 21 (no class on 10/10).

**Location:** PSRC