

Call for Papers

Representing Histories: the Past in/of Musical Theatre

27-29 September 2024; Goldsmiths, University of London

As an inherently self-referential genre, the musical on stage and screen keeps history alive and reconstitutes it not merely on the narrative level, but also through its artistic styles and forms. Enactment is a significant factor in the comprehension of musicals as are singing, dancing, *mise-en-scène* and scenography, because they offer complex constructions of social behaviours, character types, cultural, political and ethical symbols.

A large number of musicals critically and self-reflexively evoke the European past (e.g *Candide*; *Blitz!*; *Filosofská historie*; *István, a király*; *Elisabeth*; *Kristina från Duvemåla*; *The Visit*; *Standing at the Sky's Edge*, et al.). The conference aims to highlight those musicals in English and other languages that address the under-researched topic of European history in order to elaborate notions of where some of us come from.

Equally worthy of academic scrutiny are shows that dramatise elements of North American history, from *Knickerbocker Holiday* to *Ragtime*, *Hamilton* and *Come from Away*, or those which employ the popular approach of investigating the US past via its *entertainment* history (*Show Boat*; *Follies*; *Dreamgirls*, *The Scottsboro Boys*, etc.).

The topic also allows for further exploration of the comparatively uncharted terrain of musical theatre historiography. Musical theatre history is by no means a monolithic or univocal totality. There are not one but many alternative musical theatre histories. How is the genre's past itself conceived and constructed? How for instance do North American perspectives on musical theatre history differ from British or Dutch ones? How do African Americans construe the notion of the Broadway musical? How do Anglo-American views of the subject compare to Korean or Japanese or Chinese? What alternatives do feminist or queer constructions offer to traditional patriarchal notions?

The organizers would like to encourage the use of a broad range of methodological means, including repertoire analysis, performance critique, media analysis and reception history as well as the problematisation of such issues as race, gender and sexualities.

A few suggested topics for papers, presentations, panels and workshops:

- the musical's construction of (European, Asian, American, etc.) national and personal identity
- the depiction of historical events and places
- ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation in historical context
- framing the emigrant/immigrant experience
- approaches to musical theatre historiography
- myth as memory
- the past as nostalgia and heritage
- the cultural past memorialised and created in song, dance and scenography
- musical/lyrical pastiche as mean of evoking the past
- contributions of women, LGBTQ+ and ethnic minority individuals to (European, Asian, American, etc.) musical theatre
- methods of promoting diversity and equality in historical musicals
- the past in transformation from one medium to another
- the impact of live and online screenings in popularising notions of history

Scholars who are interested in exploring the various activities and productions of the Vereinigte Bühnen Wien/VBW are particularly welcome to apply. The significance and impact of this Viennese production company will form the focus of an edited volume thematically connected to the conference. Both the conference and the collection of essays are closely linked to the research project "Renegotiating the Past: The Representation of History in English and German-Language Musical Theatre Repertoire since WWII".¹

Abstracts of no more than 200 words (without your name or affiliation) should be submitted by **29 January 2024** to r.gordon@gold.ac.uk.

All submissions will be reviewed anonymously by the conference programme committee (Robert Gordon, Pamela Karantonis, Olaf Jubin, Nils Grosch and Miriam Lisa Ljubijankic); prospective participants will be notified by the end of February 2024.

¹ For more information see <https://www.plus.ac.at/kunst-musik-und-tanzwissenschaft/abteilung-musik-und-tanzwissenschaft/die-abteilung/forschungsstelle-fuer-musikalisches-theater/renegotiating-the-past/>.