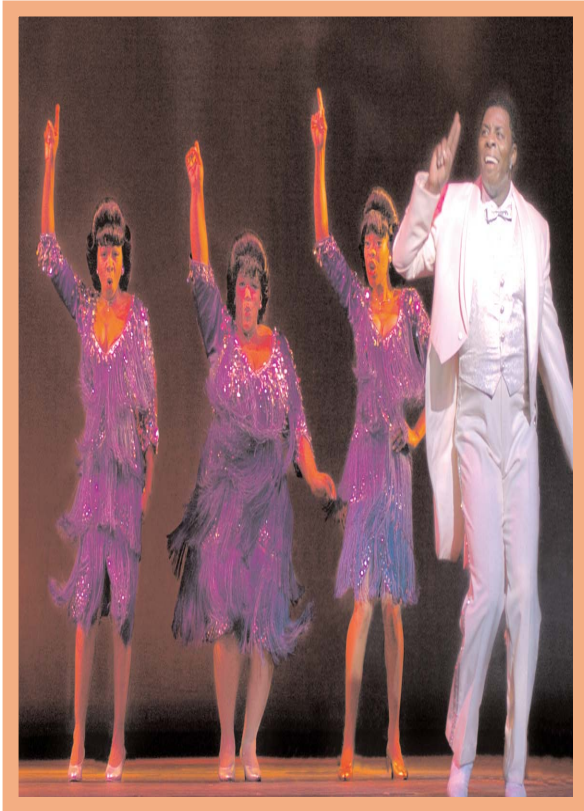


DREAMGIRLS

Educational Study Guide



THEATRE UNDER THE STARS
800 BAGBY, SUITE 200
HOUSTON, TEXAS 77002

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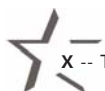
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*Dreamgirls
Educational Study Guide*

Theatre Under The Stars
Houston, Texas

Written by
Shay Thornton



Introduction

History of Theatre Under The Stars

Founded in 1968, Theatre Under The Stars (TUTS, <http://www.tuts.com>) is currently under the direction of President and CEO John C. Breckenridge. TUTS was the first theatrical organization in Houston to perform free to the public in 1968 at Miller Outdoor Theatre in Hermann Park, and is the only Houston arts organization that has performed there free to the public every year since the building opened. Since its founding by Frank M. Young, TUTS has produced more than 275 musicals including many local, national and world premieres and is currently represented on Broadway with *Disney's Beauty and the Beast*. TUTS is also noted for mounting many International tours, including Debbie Reynolds in *The Unsinkable Molly Brown*, Juliet Prowse in *Mame*, Robert Goulet in *Man of La Mancha*, and the Tony Award-winning revival of *Carousel*.

As a way to continue the tradition of musical theatre, TUTS' Humphreys School of Musical Theatre provides instruction and stage experience for more than 1,700 students annually. Since 1972, Theatre Under The Stars' Humphreys School of Musical Theatre has provided a superb and thrilling forum for musical theatre training for children and adults. Housed at the Hobby Center for the Performing Arts, The Academy and The Studio at TUTS allow students to flourish in a year-round schedule of classes. Conducted by an outstanding professional faculty and renowned resident artists who inspire and train students in every aspect of musical theatre, TUTS' Humphreys School of Musical Theatre offers everything from vocal technique and choreography to costume design and prop construction. Specifically designed for the career-track student, The Academy offers Intermediate and Advanced Studies in Tap, Ballet/Jazz, Voice and Theory, Acting, Musical Theatre Workshop, and Directing. The Academy at TUTS gives students numerous opportunities to put their training to work in performance, with a final showcase at the end of each semester. Open to babies, teens, and the young at heart, The Studio offers a variety of classes for those on a non-audition basis. The Studio at TUTS is an exciting program for learning and fun that includes early morning and evening classes, Saturday workshops and summer and winter camps. TUTS also annually presents the Tommy Tune Awards, honoring the best and brightest in Houston's high school musical theatre programs.

Purpose of Study Guides

TUTS has designed online study guides such as this one to enhance students' theatrical experiences. Using the guide, teachers can encourage their students to explore both the story and the production elements of the show. Live theater can enrich young peoples' lives like few other experiences. The study guides contain various discussion questions, projects, and activities that allow students to engage in literary analysis, historical research, and personal reflection. TUTS' hope is that these young people will be able to gain a greater understanding and appreciation for musical theatre.

" No child is fully educated or adequately prepared to live in an increasingly technological world without understanding the meaning and beauty transmitted by the arts."

J.P. Getty Trust

Beyond Creating a Place for Art in America's School, 1985



Musical Theatre 101

What is Musical Theatre?

Musical theatre establishes as the only genre of theatre that fully encompasses acting, singing, and dancing all to further the development of the plot. This differs from traditional theatre because the plot is enhanced by the addition of singing and dancing not just supplemented like it is in 'straight' plays. To better understand musical theatre as a whole, and audience member must understand the importance of these three elements. A cast member in musical theatre, who is talented at acting, singing, and dancing, is called a triple threat because they have mastered those three areas. Watching musical theatre, one must be careful to try to appreciate everything occurring on stage so they can understand what the director tried to do with the show.

History of Musical Theatre?

Musical theatre's history stretches far beyond the limits one might assume. In fact, evidence suggest elements of this art form were used over 2500 years ago! During the 5th century B.C.E. most plays in Greece were set up with one to three actors and a chorus that responded to what the characters did. Both the actors and the chorus sang lyrics throughout the play. The actors incorporated not only the dialogue and song, but dance in their parts as well. Grecian theatre can be divided into three main genres that all employ music and dance. Tragedy required a slow and graceful dance called the emmeleia, comedy used a more fast paced danced known as the kordax, and satyr plays (used for poking fun at a belief of the time) used a dance called the sikinnis that mocked tragedy's dance. Although, this all probably seems far-fetched for most, Grecian humor transcends time and elements of it are used still today! For example, did you think the crude body jokes and off-color humor used in sit-coms developed in ancient Greece? If not, think again. Tons of the guttural humor we laugh at today has been used for thousands of years. Although humor has remained the same over the years, most everything else concerning musical theatre has changed.

After the Greeks were taken over by the Romans during the Peloponnesian War, the popularity of theatre declined. The Romans, known for their military genius and stoic nature, didn't care much for theatre. The Middle Ages were not a particularly bright time for theatre, either. Performers often went from city to city performing for whomever, wherever. However, they were not always well received. A good example of this is the misconception at one time that these performers brought the plague with them, and no one would allow them admittance into the city gates. Musical theatre still managed to advance in this time period through the church. Although the history between the Roman Catholic Church and theatre is touchy at best, the Church used theatre to transmit it's messages to the illiterate masses. Most people did not know Latin, the official language of the Church, so clever monks started adding music and art to spread their faith. This went even further when cycle plays developed. A cycle play is a biblical story that has been chopped up and divided between different groups. Each group would have a pageant wagon (a stage on wheels) and they would move about the city depicting biblical stories. Once one group was done the next part of the story would start. This caused religion not only to be widespread, but also entertaining. The cycle plays helped increase the popularity of theatre, which would soon skyrocket.

The Renaissance, which in French literally means "rebirth", reawakened the public to the arts. Throughout Europe technological, literary, and stylistic advances were occurring to appease the audience of the day. One of the most famous playwrights of all time, Moliere, shows this. King Louis XV demanded a further reaching entertainment, and called on Moliere to reformat his plays to do this. Moliere added music and dance to his shows making his farcical style, song, and dance appease the king's taste during the 1600s. This style grew and by the 1700s there were two main divisions of it: the ballad opera and comic opera. The ballad opera used popular songs of the day with new lyrics, while the comic operas had original scores and a more romantic plot development. Both these styles flourished, and the idea of incorporating music into plays grew and grew.

The birth of the musical as we know it did not occur until 1866 in New York City. A theatre manager and producer, William Wheatley, was worried about his upcoming show, which he described as a boring melodrama. Looking for something to add excitement (and sell tickets) Wheatley jumped when he noticed the Academy of Music burnt down in a fire leaving their performers jobless. Wheatley and the collaborators at the Academy of Music joined together to mix the play Wheatley was producing and the ballet dancers that were scheduled to perform at the Academy. Combining the two together in a performance called *The Black Crook*, audiences were astounded at the integration of music, dance, and theatre making the popularity of this art form boom.

In the 1920's musical theatre faced its first big test. Film had just begun and was already starting to gain popularity. What was theatre going to do with this medium stealing their audience? They kept seats filled by retaliating with emphasizing theatre's stars, bigger dance routines, and adding in popular songs to all increasing the spectacle of the performances. This, however, caused the budget to increase and when the Great Depression hit in 1929 very few could afford the theatre.



History of Musical Theatre? (cont.)

The theatre lived on, however, and in the 1940's the Golden Age of musical theatre began with Rodger and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!*. This is the first piece to really incorporate dance into the plot line of the musical- which happened almost by accident. The Theatre Guild, a controlling producing agency, went bankrupt so Rodgers and Hammerstein received full artistic control. The pair took many chances including hiring the modern dance choreography, Agnes DeMille. Since the characters were cowboys and farm girls, the idea of them expressing their emotions through words seemed awkward. Choreographer, Agnes DeMill, used everyday motions to express their ideas including butter churning- not traditional showgirl dancing. Opening night proved the musical a success and is now thought of as the quintessential musical theatre piece.

Musicals still continued to evolve. After the success of *Hair* (1968), the 1970's continued to use rock influence music in their production. One example *Grease* became so famous that it has turned into a classic movie. Also the 1970's started an increase in the appearance of African American issues and themes. Both *Dreamgirls* and *The Wiz* are known for their reflecting of the changing social climate where diversity became more and more encouraged. The 1980's and 1990's brought along the rise of the "mega musicals". These incorporated larger casts, pop influenced scores, and an increase in the value upon special effects. Audiences were wowed with *The Phantom of the Opera*'s falling chandelier in 1986. The increase in spectacle had many implications, however. Now it has become impossible for a single individuals to fund shows, so more and more corporations are getting involved. The increased cost also meant that ticket prices would increase. The price increase changed the status of theatre to a more upper class activity. Jonathon Larson's *Rent* tried to change this when he added heavily stylized rock music and a young cast. The 21st century has brought on a combination of many revivals and new styles to musical theatre. The revivals of shows provide almost a guarantee to producers that people will support the show, but new shows stretch the limits of theatre. *Avenue Q* is a new production where adult themed material is performed with puppets. Overall, musical theatre has had an interesting past, but the future seems just as unique.

How to make a Musical in 10 steps?

- 1) Pick the **PERFECT** musical! To do this you need to evaluate if audiences will like it, how much it costs, and if you can secure the rights to do the show. Sometimes you can't secure the rights to a musical if the licensing company thinks too many people are performing it in an area or if it is on Broadway.
- 2) Plan a **BUDGET**! Understanding how much you can spend on salaries, sets, costumes, musicians- while still paying bills to rent the theatre, pay the box office workers, and general upkeep is crucial to putting your musical up.
- 3) Secure the **CREATIVE** team! This goes beyond just the director (although they are important too), a musical needs a choreographer, music director, conductor, set designer, prop master... (the list goes on and on)!
- 4) Have a **PRODUCTION** meeting with the creative team! During these meetings the overall concept of the show should be discussed.
- 5) Actors **AUDITION**! This exciting process takes place in Houston, New York, and Los Angeles. After the initial auditions callbacks are scheduled to let the director see people audition again. At callbacks, actors usually prepare a song or scene from the show.
- 6) **CAST** the show! During this step discussions with actors agents agree (or sometimes don't agree) on how much the performers will be paid.
- 7) Start **REHEARSALS**! Once everyone is situated in Houston, rehearsals start for the performance. This is when actors learn their blocking, songs, and dance. Rehearsals sometimes can last as short as 2 weeks before a show opens
- 8) **PREPARE** all costumes, props, sets, and lights. This takes weeks of work on the production team's effort so that all the little details are taken care of.
- 9) Have a **TECH** rehearsal! During this step it is important to have patience because trying to get the lights, sound, and cues perfect is a very hard job. This usually happens during one of the very last rehearsals.
- 10) Go on for a fabulous **OPENING** night! Your nerves might be high, however, all your work won't be lost because the cast and crew are so well prepared!



Jobs on a Production Team

A musical is much more than the two and a half hour show the audience sees. The production process often takes many months, even years, to complete.

Librettist

No musical would be possible without the imagination or inspiration of its authors. Over one third of the musicals on Broadway come from an existing book, play, article, or movie. Other times, authors write musicals from an original idea or concept. The **librettist** is the book writer- the person that writes the script for a musical. Just to show the importance of a strong script, most musicals with a strong score, but bad libretto will fail, while shows with an average score and strong script could succeed.

Composer/ Lyricist

A musical isn't complete without music so a **composer** and **lyricist** will do this job. Composers and lyricists begin to write the songs that fit the overall tone of the musical, but also carry the plot along so the audience can better understand the show. The composer writes the music, while the lyricist writes words to go along. Sometimes the same person will do both tasks. There have also been a few people who have been successful as a composer, librettist, and lyricist. This select group includes George M. Cohan, Noel Coward, Meredith Wilson, and Jonathan Larson.

Producer

Producers are a rather unknown field of theatre occupations. In the past, a show would only have one producer who had a tremendous impact on the creative direction of the show. Many shows started because a single producer had an idea for a musical and wanted to make it come to life. Now that musicals have become big business, however, it is almost impossible for a single producer to put up a show. Now Broadway shows have a dozen or so producers making it hard for them to exercise creative control.

Director

The **director** is the person who stages the show to make it come to life for the audience. In the past directors were merely puppets doing what the producer envisioned, but since the 1950s they have taken basically full control. A director has to work with the cast on singing, acting, and dancing to tell a cohesive story for the audience. The director will help each actor understand their motivation for the show, block the action, and oversee how everything comes together. The director is the "top dog" in most shows that everyone answers to. They are in control of the overall artistic vision of the show.

Choreographer

A **choreographer** designs dance sequences for the performers to follow the director's vision. The dances are intricate movements that allow the performers to express the meaning of each song. Through the choreography, the audience should understand what the characters are feeling. The choreographer used to be called the dance director, but changed when ballet choreographers started working on musicals. This person usually spends a large amount of time rehearsing all the dances with the cast.

INVESTOR

Investors traditionally would give a few thousand dollars in return for tickets and possibly money back from their investment if the show was a hit. This is no longer the case, however, because of the high price of producing a Broadway show. Now investors contribute hundreds of thousands of dollars with little chance that any of that money coming back. What is the point then? Most investors enjoy being in "show business" and they usually get great seats to see shows!



Casting Director

A **casting director** has the hard job of finding the perfect person to play each role of a production. They need to stay up to date on the ever-changing talent and be ready to set up an audition for major and minor roles at any moment. Casting directors usually work as free agents for a variety of producers, but in some cases top producers have their very own casting directors.

Dance Captain

A **dance captain** has to be one of the most skilled dancers in the cast who can learn quickly and help teach. In big productions on Broadway, national tours, or major regional productions most choreographers are not going to be available to be on hand for every performance in case a cast member forgets a step. This is where a dance captain helps. They make sure everyone stays sharp on their dances and are there to teach any forgotten moves.

Music Director

The **music director** is in control of basically all the music in the show. They help the cast learn the music, and then they are given the task of helping pace the music. The music director can sometimes conduct the orchestra as well, which comes in handy because they know the music of the show do well. They usually hire the orchestra members as well.



Designers

Whatever you see onstage probably did not come off a store rack, so costuming is very important! A **costume designer** has to design how the costumes should look so that they are historically correct, and build them in a way that they can stand the rough day to day wears & washings

A **sound director** has the complex job of making everything heard! Since most of the characters onstage have a microphone on, the sound designer needs to watch how loud that each mic gets. This job used to not even be listed in the playbill, but with the rise of technology, it is now a crucial part of theatre.

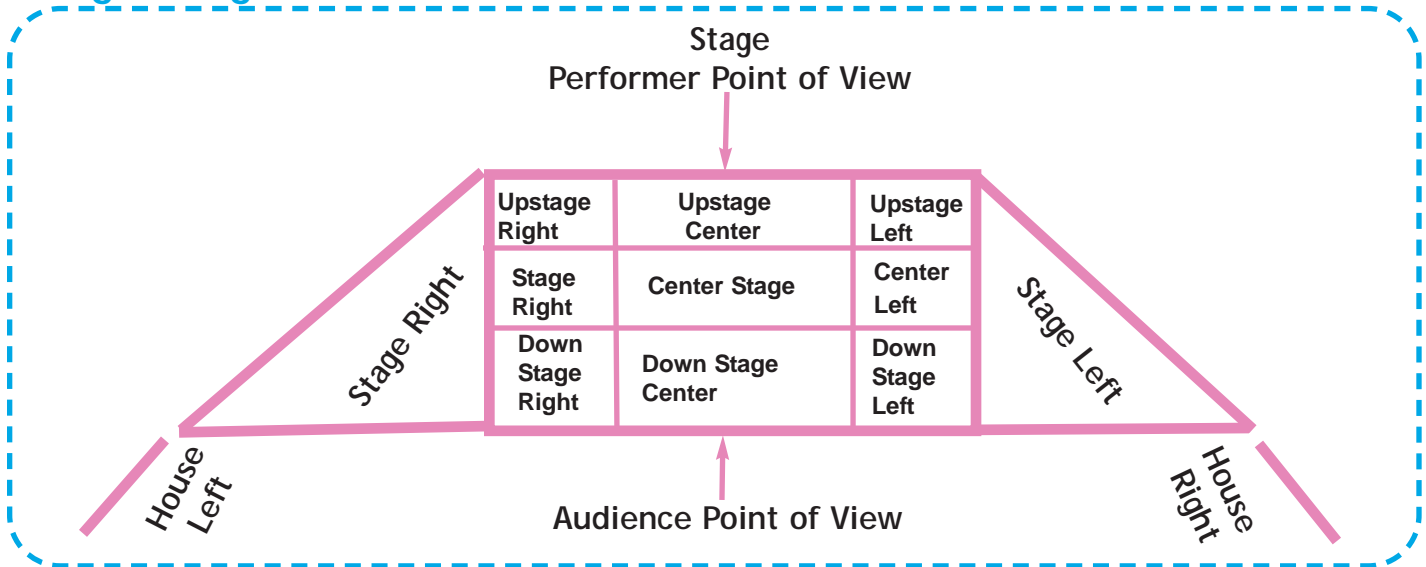
How would a show look if you couldn't see it? Probably not very good! A **lighting designer's** job is the task of making everything that needs to be shown visible to the audience, while also setting the tone and mood with the lighting design. A lighting designer also has to be aware of the actors movements so they don't fall out of the light.

The **set designer** plays an important role in the audience being able to be taken to the place of the action during the play. They are responsible to design how the set should look, and what materials will be used to build it. Sometimes the set designer will double as the scenic painter, and paint the set pieces as well!

Stage Manager

The **stage manager** is usually the unsung hero of a production. They are in control of making sure all the elements of a show come together during each and every performance. They are in control of "calling the show" meaning they cue all the technical actions of the show. The SM is in full command of the back-stage area, and once the show opens they receive full control from the director. The stage manager's script or "bible" has every single cue marked for the whole show, so that the action can continue onstage trouble-free. The stage manager usually has a team of assistants that can be anywhere doing whatever is needed.

Stage Diagram

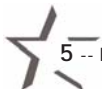


Why is Musical Theatre Important?

Musical theatre is unlike any other medium of entertainment, which makes it important. Any live theatrical experience not only involves the actors on stage, it also involves the audience in ways that film and television do not. There is no barrier between the performers and the audience like in film or television. Each performance allows each of us to become our own editors because we can choose to watch whatever part of the stage we want to. The wonders of movies and television are remarkable, but often provide an isolated experience. Being part of the communal magic when performer and audience connect at the theater cannot be duplicated. How the audience reacts to the show deeply affects the actors. Something seemingly trivial like whispering or unwrapping a piece of candy can distract the actors and alter the mood and tone of their performance.

Musical theatre can help students grow academically, aesthetically and personally. Musical theatre writers, lyricists, and composers have long looked to literature for their inspiration and subject material. As a result, students have the opportunity to engage in literary analysis of both the story and its inspiration. Elementary students can begin to explore plot and characters, while junior high and high school students can delve into theme, symbolism, and historical context.

Students will also have the opportunity to discover how music, dance, lighting, backdrops, etc. contribute to the show. Musical theatre allows young people to explore the elements of production beyond television and film, and gain a greater appreciation for the arts.



Glossary of Terms

Author - the writer of a musical script also called the book

Audition - to perform in order to get a role in the production; usually includes singing, dancing, and reading scenes from the show

Ballad - a slow, romantic song for actors to showcase vocal clarity

Blocking - the specific movements of actors on stage

Box - a separate compartment of seats usually elevated on the sides of the theater, for the accommodation of VIP's

Box Office - a booth inside the theater where tickets are sold
"Calling the Show" - the process of calling out the lighting, sound, and scene-change cues during a performance usually done by the stage manager

Casting - the process through which actors are chosen for roles in the production

Casting Agent - one who chooses actors for roles in the production

Child Wrangler - one who works with child performers

Choreographer - one who designs dance sequences

Composer - one who writes music

Conductor - one who directs the orchestra

Dance Captain - one who teaches and rehearses dance sequences with the performers

Director - one who supervises the creative aspects and guides the artistic vision of the production

Dress Rehearsal - rehearsal in which performers practice with costumes and props

Dresser - one who assists performers with their costumes during dress rehearsals and shows

Electrician - one who works with the lighting designer to adjust and operate lighting instruments

Emmeleia - a dance for the Grecian tragedies that was slow and graceful

Ensemble / Chorus - a group of singers, dancers, or actors who perform musical numbers

Flyman - one who pulls the curtain before and after performances and operates the flying system, if one is used

Gallery - the section of seats in a theater farthest away from the stage; separated into front gallery and rear gallery

Head Carpenter - one who builds the sets for the production

Headshot - a photograph of an actor from the shoulders up and lists his or her credits on the back

House Left - the left side of the theater, when facing the stage (audience's point of view)

House Manager - one who oversees all aspects of the audience; responsible for ushers and audience safety

House Right - the right side of the theater, when facing the stage (audience's point of view)

Kordax - a dance for Grecian comedies that was up beat

Lighting Designer - one who decides where the lighting instruments should go, how they should be colored, and which ones should be on at any particular time to affect mood, visibility, and to showcase costumes and sets

Lyricist - one who writes the words to a song

Makeup Artist - one who applies cosmetics to a performer's face and body

Marquee - a signboard projecting over the theater's entrance

Mezzanine - the middle section of seats in a theater between the orchestra and the gallery; separated into front mezzanine and rear mezzanine

Music Director - one who teaches and rehearses the music with the orchestra

Orchestra - the section of seats in a theater immediately behind where the orchestra sits

Principal Performers - the leading actors, those who portray the major roles

Program - a listing of the order of events, names of the cast and crew, and other relevant information for the production

Property (Props) Master - one who manages all items used on stage that cannot be classified as scenery, electrics or wardrobe

Read-through - the cast reads through the script without movement or music

Rehearsal Pianist - one who plays the piano for early-stage rehearsals

Set Designer - one who creates the scenery for the stage

Sikinnis - a dance for the Grecian satyr plays that mocked tragedy

Sitzprobe - the first rehearsal with both the performers and the orchestra, with no staging or dancing

Sound Designer - one who plans and executes the layout of all sound playback and equipment for the show

Sound Operator - one who handles the sound playback and mixing equipment for the show; works with the sound designer

Sound Board - a desk comprising a number of input channels where each sound source is provided with its own control channel through which sound signals are routed into two or more outputs; changes the quality of the sound

Sound Effects Designer - one who creates or enhances sounds that are not part of the music or dialogue

Standby / Understudy - one who studies a role and is prepared to substitute the principal performer when needed

Stage Left - the left side of the stage, when facing the audience (performer's point of view)

Stage Manager - one who is responsible for the quality of the show's production, assists the director and oversees the show at each performance

Stage Right - the right side of the stage, when facing the audience (performer's point of view)

Swings - one who is prepared to substitute for ensemble or chorus members who are unable to perform

Tailor - one who alters garments to fit a person's specific measurements

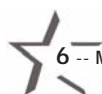
Technical Rehearsal - rehearsal incorporating the technical elements of a show, such as the scene and property shifts, lighting, sound, and special effects

Uptempo Song - a fast, upbeat song for actors to showcase dancing and acting ability

Usher - one who guides audience members to their seats

Wanderprobe - rehearsal in which the performers practice singing and dancing on stage while the orchestra plays

Wig Master / Mistress - one who obtains and customizes wigs for performers to wear



Going to the Theatre!

Some basic theatre etiquette tips:

1. Do not talk, whisper, sing, or hum during the performance. Singing and swaying with the music or leaning forward in your seat blocks the view of those sitting behind you.
2. Do not eat and drink during the performance. It is distracting to both the performers and your neighbors.
3. Keep feet on the floor, not on the seat or balcony in front of you.
4. Clap after the songs to show the performers that you are enjoying the show. Also keep in mind that performers appreciate enthusiastic applause, but not whistling or shouting.
5. Appropriate laughter, tears, and applause are the best ways to express your feelings about the performance.
6. Stay until the end of the show and clap during the curtain call to say "thank you" to the performers.
7. No electronic devices should be brought into the theatre, and please silence all cell phones, pagers and watches.

Going to the Theatre!

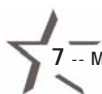
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How About Trivia?

Do you know Roman actors wore the first tap shoes?

They would attach pieces of metal called *scabillas*, to the bottoms of their shoes so audiences would be able to hear the performers feet!

Did you know it used to be okay to talk in theatres!

Before the introduction of electric lighting, the goal of theatre was to be seen, not necessarily to be heard. Audience members would talk through performances and sometimes even correct the actors if they messed up! Now it would be very rude to disrupt a performance by talking, so be warned!

Did you know actors used to "buy the audience"?

Actors hired a *claque*, a group of people paid to applaud an actor, to gain fame. Although this isn't in theatre anymore, it is still rumored to exist in opera.

Not until Duke of Saxe-Meiningen Georg wanted historical accuracy in plays did theatre start providing costumes. Take a look back at Shakespearean plays where the actors wore doublets and tunics (clothing of the time) during shows set in ancient Greece.

Did you know actors were supposed to supply their own costumes for hundreds of years?

Do you know how old lip-syncing is?

In ancient Rome, popular actors like Livius Andronicus, would have someone speak their words while they did the movements if they were sick.

Do you know how ancient actors got into character?

Actors are known for trying to experience the character they are portraying. The Greek actor Polus, while playing the part of Electra, in Sophocles' *Electra*, carried an urn of his own dead son's ashes to represent the late brother his character was mourning.

Do you know what the proscenium arch (the picture frame archway built around the stage) is named after?

A *skene* was a building in Greek theatre that provided the backdrop which the actors performed in front of. Add the prefix "pro" meaning before and the term literally means before the *skene* or in front of the backdrop.

Do you know how old the traditions of spotlights in theatre have been used for?

Back in medieval times, when electricity hadn't been invented, stage hands would polish basins to reflect sunlight back in a beam on lead actors. This helped focus the audience's attention on what the director wanted the focus to be.



Review Questions

The following questions are intended to help students learn the basics of musical theatre. These may be used for class discussion or given as homework and written assignments.

Checking for Understanding

1. What is the definition of musical theatre?
2. Where is humor from ancient Greece still found today?
3. How did the Roman Catholic Church help theatre?
4. Who formulated the musical as we know it today?
5. What was the problem facing musical theatre in the 1920's?
6. What was the first musical to incorporate story telling in dance?
7. How can you be your own editor in theatre?
8. What does a choreographer do?
9. Draw a diagram noting upstage, downstage, stage left, and stage right. Can you further divide it?
10. What are four major theatre etiquette tips?

Critical Thinking

1. Do you think theatre from another time period would interest us today? Why or why not? Give an example.
2. What about musical theatre seems the most interesting? Why do you find this appealing?
3. Do you think since spectacle is so important in musicals now it will stay that way forever? What technology might have encouraged this?
4. What step do you think is the most important in making a musical? The most challenging? The most fun?
5. What do you hope to gain from experiencing musical theatre?
6. What theatre element seems the most important? Do you think your neighbor would feel the same?
7. How can audiences influence performers since there is a new audience every night?
8. If you were to teach a child how to behave at the theater, what would you tell them?



Review Activities

The following activities and projects are intended to encourage students to further their understanding of musical theatre, and may also be used for class assignments or take-home projects.

6th - 12th Grade

I N S P I R A T I O N

OBJECTIVE: To learn how historical context has affected and inspired musical theatre, and develop research and public speaking skills

ACTIVITY: Have students choose a musical to research and then create a presentation of how the show reflects the times in which it was created, including historical figures and relevant social or political issues. Encourage students to watch videos of the show, study song lyrics, and research the time period in which the musical was written.
Suggested Shows: Oklahoma, West Side Story, Bye Bye Birdie, Peter Pan, Annie, The Sound of Music, Ragtime

D E B A T E

OBJECTIVE: To learn the differences between various media, develop public speaking and verbal expression skills, and encourage self-expression

ACTIVITY: Divide the class into three groups and have each group choose a form of media (ex. television, newspapers, or theatre). Then have the groups debate on which medium is the best. Make sure students support their claims with specific benefits and limitations of each medium. Have opening remarks be done as a skit showing the same story done in each medium. Students should leave understanding the differences in each storytelling medium.



About The Show

Show Background

Dreamgirls opened on December 20, 1981 at the Imperial Theatre on Broadway and ran for an astounding 1522 performances until August 11, 1985. This musical was nominated for 13 Tony awards and won 6. The musical had a long wait until it received fame. In 1975, Henry Krieger and Tom Eyn became inspired to write a show about African American back-up singers. The show, originally entitled *Project #9*, started workshops with Michael Bennett joining the production team. The second workshop brought Jennifer Holliday to play Effie, but she left the project after some disapproval with her character and the material. Bennett, himself was uncomfortable with the material at this time as well, but another workshop was scheduled. Here the title was changed from *Big Dreams* to *Dreamgirls*. The fourth workshop involved sitting around a table constructing the story. Jennifer Holliday joined, left, and re-joined the production again. Finally, the show opened at Boston's Shubert Theatre in November 1981. The first show was cancelled due to failing voices, but then went on to Broadway and national tours.

On December 25, 2006 a film adaptation entitled *Dreamgirls* opened nationwide receiving rave reviews. It received 3 Golden Globes including Best Picture (Musical/ Comedy) and 2 Oscars. Minor changes were made including the setting of the trio's hometown and the location of the talent show. The estimated budget for the movie was \$70 million, according to imdb.com, making it the most expensive film with an all African American cast ever.

The Creative Team

Michael Bennett

Director & Co-choreographer

Michael Bennett was born on April 8, 1943 in Buffalo, New York. He was a child dance prodigy and even started staging his own shows in high school. When he was 16 he dropped out of school for his first big break playing Baby John in *West Side Story*. He worked on Broadway as a dancer and then started doing choreography. *Promises* was his first big hit as a choreographer, and he grew to be more and more popular. *A Chorus Line* and *Dreamgirls* are his two big successes earning him many awards. Bennett was diagnosed as HIV + and passed away on July 2, 1987, days after *Dreamgirls* re-opened on Broadway.



Henry Krieger

Music by

Henry Krieger was born on February 9, 1945 in New York, New York. He grew up in New York state and then attended American University and Columbia University. Upon graduation, Krieger began composing for Off-Off Broadway productions. He teamed up with Michael Bennett during the workshops to write the music for *Dreamgirls* - a very arduous task. Other shows he has composed for include *Radio Music City Hall Christmas Spectacular* and *Tap Dance Kid*. Krieger also worked as the musical director for 52nd Street Project, where professionals and kids pair up for a produc-



Tom Eyn

Book by

Tom Eyn was born on August 14, 1941 in Cambridge, Ohio. He studied at Ohio State University until 1960 when he moved to New York City to further study acting. He worked as an actor and then developed his own theatre called Theatre of the Eye in 1964. He is the author of over 30 plays and well known for his Off-Off Broadway experimental theatre work. *Dreamgirls* is Eyn's most popular and mainstream work. Besides writing plays, Eyn also worked on the *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman* TV show in the 1970's. Eyn passed away on May 26, 1991 in Florida.



A Brief Show Overview

Character List

The Stepp Sisters, competed at talent show
Tiny Joe Dixon, competed at talent show
Little Albert and the Tru Tones, competed at talent show
The M-C, hosted talent show
Marty, veteran music agent for Jimmy Early
Curtis Taylor Jr., shady businessman who takes an interest in the Dreams & Jimmy Early
Deena Jones, Dreamette who is young, naive & impressionable
Lorrell Robinson, Dreamette who has her eye on Jimmy Early
Effie Melody White, Dreamette who turns into a diva
C.C. White, Effie's brother & songwriter
James "Thunder" Early, music star
Dave and the Sweethearts, mainstream band who steals Jimmy Early's hit song
Frank, press agent
Dwight, T.V. director
Michelle Morris, Effie's replacement in The Dreams
Jerry, night club owner who helps Effie get back on her feet
Carl, piano player

Song List

ACT 1

Scene 1- Apollo Theatre
I'm Looking for Something Goin' Downtown
Takin' the Long Way Home
Move (You're Steppin' on My Heart)
Fake Your Way to the Top
 Scene 2- On the Road
Cadillac Car
 Scene 3- A Recording Studio
Cadillac Car
 Scene 4- Limbo
Cadillac Car
Steppin' to the Bad Side
 Scene 5- A Hotel in St. Louis
Party, Party
 Scene 6- Miami
I Want You Baby
 Scene 7- Dressing Room in the Atlantic Hotel
Family
 Scene 8- Cleveland
Dreamgirls
Press Conference
Only the Beginning
 Scene 9- A TV Studio
Heavy
 Scene 10- San Francisco
Heavy
 Scene 11- Las Vegas (Backstage)
It's All Over
And I Am Telling You I'm Not Going
 Scene 12- Las Vegas (Onstage)
Love Love You Baby

ACT II

Scene 1- Las Vegas Hilton
"Dreams" Medley
 Scene 2- Chicago Nightclub
I Am Changing
 Scene 3- Vogue Magazine Photo Call
One More Picture Please
When I First Saw You
 Scene 4- National Democratic Fundraiser
Got to Be Good Times
Ain't No Party
I Meant You No Harm
Quintette
The Rap
 Scene 5- A Chicago Recording Studio
I Miss You Old Friend
One Night Only
 Scene 6- Los Angeles
One Night Only
 Scene 7- Chicago
I'm Somebody
Faith in Myself
 Scene 8- New York
Hard to Say Goodbye, My Love



Show Synopsis

Act I

Act one opens with *I'm Looking for Something*, *Goin' Downtown*, and *Takin' the Long Way Home* performed by the contestants at the Apollo Theatre's 1967 talent contest. Famous artist, James "Thunder" Early's, back up vocalists have just quit before his tour. A musical trio featuring Effie, Deena, and Lorrell hurry in late for their spot, ready to win and become famous. They perform, as The Dreams, singing Move (*You're Stepping on My Heart*) and catch Jimmy Early's manager, Marty's, eye. Curtis, an aspiring businessman, fixes the competition so that the Dreams don't win to impress Marty, who then approaches the trio to perform as back up singers on Jimmy's tour. Effie, the lead singer, outraged at the contest loss refuses his offer, but soon agrees and the girls go on tour with Jimmy (*Fake Your Way to the Top*).



On the tour, Jimmy decides he needs new material to keep his act alive. Curtis senses this as a time in to move in on Marty's client and hires Effie's brother C.C. to write songs. C.C. writes *Cadillac Car* for Jimmy, which rises in the charts. The success is short lived, however. It falls victim to the music industry's tactics when a more mainstream pop band covers the song (*Cadillac Car- Reprise*). Curtis, furious that the success he planned failed, vows to never let it happen again and illegally pays every DJ to play Jimmy Early's song *Steppin' to the Bad Side*, which rises to number 1 on the charts.

As the group celebrates its success singing *Party, Party*, Curtis reveals his next goal for the group: to become the first African American group to play at Miami's Atlantic Hotel. (Marty looks upon the proposition skeptically, but just as Curtis starts a relationship with Effie the Miami contract is signed). Jimmy and the Dreamettes perform *I Want You Baby*.

The next step in Curtis' master plan involves moving The Dreams from back up to an act of their own. Effie, instantly elated by the idea of her dream as a lead singer coming true, gets knocked down when Curtis chooses Deena and her more mainstream appearance to be the lead singer. The group expresses through *Family* that Deena is the best thing for the group, and Effie will get her chance- later. Although she believes the best thing for the group is her talent, a jealous Effie steps out of the limelight for now.

The Dreams play Cleveland, Ohio, solo to much success (*Dreamgirls*), and Curtis plans to make the group, especially Deena, a huge star. Effie's concerns get shoved into the background, while Curtis spends most of his time on Deena fine-tuning her image (*Press Conference*). Finally Effie can't take it anymore and starts acting up (*Heavy* and *Heavy- Reprise*). Conflict arises when Curtis replaces Effie (*It's All Over*). In response, Effie reaches out (*And I'm Telling You I'm Not Going*), but Curtis rejects her and The Dreams continue on their rise to stardom (*Love Love You Baby*) leaving her behind.

Act II

Five years have passed and Deena and the Dreams are now at the high point of their career (*"Dreams" Medley*). In Chicago, Effie starts all over again with Marty. Frustrated with her difficult behavior, Marty helps her swallow her pride (*I Am Changing*).

As Effie's life improves, The Dreams face more challenges (*One More Picture Please*). Deena, who has married Curtis, longs to be in movies, but Curtis will not allow it (*When I First Saw You*). Tensions also develop between C.C. and Curtis over one of C.C.'s songs. Things come to a head at a performance (*Got To Be Good Times*) between Lorraine and Jimmy who have been dating for seven years and Lorraine (*Ain't No Party*) finally leaves him for good even with him begging (*I Meant You No Harm*). Jimmy and The Dreams perform the *Quintette*, then Jimmy misbehaves at a concert and performs *The Rap* to which he is instantly fired.

C.C. and Effie meet up for the first time in years (*I Miss You Old Friend*), when he gives her the song *One Night Only*. This proves to be Effie's big break and the record rises on the charts. Curtis, furious at them, releases a disco version of The Dreams covering the song, sinking Effie's career (*One Night Only- Reprise*). Marty uncovers Curtis' illegal business practices and brings a lawyer to settle the affair. The Dreamettes reunite for a farewell concert (*I'm Somebody*) and with *Faith in Myself* Effie joins them for the last number *Hard to Say Goodbye, My Love*.



Middle & High School Curriculum

The following questions are intended to encourage students to go beyond the surface of the play by engaging in literary analysis and outside research. These may be used to prompt class discussions or be given as written assignments.

Digging A Little Deeper

Plot: refers to the arrangement of the events in a story that each follow plausibly from one to the next to create a logical order

Exposition: devices by which critical elements of the plot, often involving back-story, are not directly depicted, but instead are presented through dialogue (or lyrics) by either characters or a narrator; information is often crucial for the audience to understand the story's action

Rising Action: refers to the period after the exposition and after a conflict has been introduced to a story's plot;

Climax: a point of a story's highest tension or drama

Falling Action: a series of events in a story that follow the climax which serve as a conclusion of the story

Resolution: the end of a story in which all conflicts are resolved, creating normality for the characters or release of tension and anxiety for the audience

Subplot: refers to a series of connected actions within a story that functions separately from the main plot and may connect to it either in time and place or thematic significance. Often involves the supporting characters in a story

Protagonist: the character that is the central figure of a story and his or her attitudes and actions are made clearest to the audience. Also characterized by an ability to change or evolve

Antagonist: the character, group of characters, or entity that represents the opposition against which the protagonist or other characters must contend with

Literary
Terminology

Discovering The Plot

1. Describe the main plot of the story in a brief paragraph. Next, identify a subplot, and summarize it and its relationship to the main plot.
2. Using the synopsis (pg. 13), categorize the important moments of the story into rising action, the climax, falling action, and the resolution. Briefly explain why you chose each moment in one or two sentences.
3. Become familiar with the meaning of exposition. In *Dreamgirls*, what information was given that helped you understand the action of the story? In what ways did the show communicate this information? Was there any information you inferred (assumed) from the exposition? What were you still unclear about after the exposition?
4. Who would you call the protagonist? Could there be two or more? Does it change or evolve by the story's end? If so, explain why you feel this way.
5. Who is the antagonist in the story? Is there more than one? Can you find a specific person or is it a group? Outline who is the antagonist at each point of the story. Does it change?
6. What do you feel is the climax? Defend what you think with a short paragraph. Now discuss with your neighbor which moment they thought was the climax. Explain why or why not you were different.

Discovering The Historical Context

1. *Dreamgirls* is set in America during the 1960s and 1970s, a very interesting time of change in the ideals of Americans concerning race. In what ways does the production provide background about this setting through dialogue, action, props, and sets? Describe historical events that happened during the time period considering race. Do you feel that they are reflected here? What is this musical saying about race?
2. This musical addresses many issues of betrayal, discrimination, friendships, and conniving business practices. Do these transcend the historical context or are they not relevant today? Explain why or why not? Give an example.
3. This story describes the struggle African Americans faced to get their music to a bigger audience. Describe other similar struggles that African Americans or any minority group went through to have their voice heard in other arenas. How are they similar and different?
4. What do you feel the musical is saying about the race relations during this time period? Why do you feel the cast is predominantly African American? What point were the authors trying to get across only using one racial group?



Digging A Little Deeper (cont.)

Discovering The Theme

1. Identify and describe the major themes in *Dreamgirls*. Do you feel the themes are easily discernable. If you believe they are more difficult to find, how so?
2. Explain how *Dreamgirls* uses the idea of betrayal and trust as a driving plot motivator. How do these two ideas clash with each other in thematic functions? What do you feel this juxtaposition shows the audience?
3. How does *Dreamgirls* portray handling conflict, specifically dealing with people close to you? Where do these conflicts ultimately lead the characters in the story? Are they able to resolve their conflict?
4. Issues of pride arise throughout the story as catalysts for conflict. Describe how both Jimmy and Effie's pride get in their way? Explain the difference between pride and self-respect in this show.
5. The end of the musical leaves much unsaid. What literary value lies behind this open ending? Write what you feel this leaves the audience with at the end of the performance.

Discovering The Symbolism

1. Do you feel the members of the band *The Dreamettes* are used to symbolize particular stereotypes? Describe what each character symbolizes? Do you feel any character characterizes what a strong woman embodies? Describe why or why not.
2. How are the men portrayed in this musical? Do they fall under any stereotypes? Which character embodies the nicest person? What do you think the authors were trying to get across with these depictions?
3. The title, *Dreamgirls*, raises questions about how the three women are used to embody what men find as attractive. What attributes does this entail? What does this symbolize as positive female to male relationships to the audience? Do you agree?
4. Race relations are symbolized through the song, *Cadillac Car*. How does the progression from an African American hit to a more mainstream song change the tone of the song? What are the authors trying to say with this point?
5. Read over the lyrics to *Family* on page 19. Why do you feel they are using the symbolism of a family to appease Effie? What emotions does this draw out? Do you feel this is right?



Get Creative!

The following project ideas are intended to enhance students' musical theatre experience through the analysis and creation of art. They may be assigned as in-class written assignments, take-home projects, or presentations.

TWO THUMBS UP!

OBJECTIVE: To develop an understanding of the elements in a theatre production

ACTIVITY: Read the reviews that came out about *Dreamgirls* when it appeared as a revival on Broadway (pg. 19-20). Now write your own review of the production examining the technical and creative side of the performance. Do you share any of the same ideas of the original critic? If you do, what does this say about the actual script of the show? If you don't, what does that mean regarding the script of the show? In a short paragraph describe how you can disagree with other reviewers after seeing the same performance. How is this difference even further heightened when there is a 20 year gap in the performances?

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

OBJECTIVE: To engage in literary analysis, develop research techniques, and develop presentation skills

ACTIVITY: There is a lot of controversy surrounding *Dreamgirls* about whether it is based on the group *The Supremes* or not. Research the tumultuous relationship of *The Supremes* and decide whether you feel it is based on them or not. Take into account both acts when doing this. Divide the class into two groups- one supporting the similarities as inspiration and one defending that the similarities are mere coincidence. Hold a debate over the argument. Each side should come up with opening remarks, evidence, and closing remarks. After the debate, discuss persuasion skills in writing, and have each student write a paper defending their point of view.

YOU ARE THE PLAYWRIGHT

OBJECTIVE: To develop creative writing skills, stimulate imagination, and develop presentation skills

ACTIVITY: In most musicals there is a sense of closure at the end of the performance. In *Dreamgirls*, much is left up to the audience to decide. Write a script about what would happen next to the characters- like an alternate ending to the show. Conclude it in a way that the audience is not left without knowledge of what will happen next to the characters. After finishing this, in a short paragraph, describe the advantages of leaving the play without a definite ending. Which ending would you choose to perform if you could produce the play? Defend your answer.

YOU ARE THE ACTOR

OBJECTIVE: To develop an understanding of plot, develop creative writing skills, stimulate imagination, encourage teamwork, and develop presentation skills

ACTIVITY: Before starting each role, an actor needs to thoroughly examine and understand their character. Sometimes an actor will write a character study describing all their characters traits and backstory. Write a character study on your favorite character. Focus on creating a backstory (what happened in their life before what you see on stage) that formed their attitudes and beliefs seen in the play. A good way to start would be talking about the family they were raised in, if they did well in school, and a list of their favorites. After doing this, in a short paragraph, describe why you think this would be an important tool for an actor to have before rehearsing.



Mini Quiz

1. What was the show **first** called?
 - a. *The Dirtiest Show in Town*
 - b. *Big Dreams*
 - c. *Dreamgirls*
 - d. *Project #9*
 - e. *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman*
2. How many workshops did the play have before it opened?
 - a. None
 - b. 1
 - c. 2
 - d. 3
 - e. 4
3. Who was the actress that kept quitting the workshops?
 - a. Jennifer Hudson
 - b. Gale Edwards
 - c. Jennifer Holliday
 - d. Sheryl Lee Ralph
 - e. Ramona Brooks
4. How many Tonys did *Dreamgirls* win?
 - a. 13
 - b. 6
 - c. 7
 - d. 4
 - e. none
5. Who was the director and co-choreographer?
 - a. Michael Bennett
 - b. Henry Krieger
 - c. James Early
 - d. Tom Eyen
 - e. Jennifer Holliday
6. What song do the *Dreamettes* sing at the talent competition?
 - a. *Move (You're Steppin on My Heart)*
 - b. *Goin' Downtown*
 - c. *Cadillac Car*
 - d. *It's All Over*
 - e. None of the above
7. Who is Effie's brother?
 - a. Curtis Taylor Jr.
 - b. Tiny Joe Nixon
 - c. C.C. White
 - d. Jimmy Early
 - e. None of the above
8. Who replaces Effie as the lead singer?
 - a. Deena
 - b. Lorrell
 - c. Michelle
 - d. One of the Stepp Sisters
 - e. No one
9. What song of Jimmy's is stolen by a more main-stream band?
 - a. *I Am Changing*
 - b. *Steppin' to the Bad Side*
 - c. *Party, Party*
 - d. *Cadillac Car*
 - e. *When I First Saw You*
10. What song does C.C. give Effie to re-start her career?
 - a. *Faith in Myself*
 - b. *One Night Only*
 - c. *Dreamgirls*
 - d. *Hard to Say Goodbye, My Love*
 - e. *I Want You Baby*



Mini Quiz Answers

1. D
2. E
3. C
4. B
5. A
6. A
7. C
8. A
9. D
10. B



Section Six: Supplemental Materials

More Material

First Review

The Dream is Back – And Better

by Howard Kissel

New York Daily News (June 29, 1987)

Believe it or not, the scaled-down *Dreamgirls* that has arrived on Broadway is a much more satisfying and entertaining show than the original.

The 1981 production of this saga about a group like the Supremes was the last word in contemporary stagecraft, infinitely subtler in its use of technology than, say, *Starlight Express*. But its overall tone was icy and overbearing.

It is courageous of Michael Bennett to bring back a visually less imposing production. The emphasis now is on story and character, not technical brilliance. Considering the state of Broadway now, his gesture seems unusually important and healthy.

The new cast has some great performers, particularly Herbert L. Rawlings, a sensational singer and dancer, as a wildman of rock. Lillias White has the tough job of filling Jennifer Holliday's shoes. In retrospect, the emotional weight Holliday brought to the show was too much for its slight score. White is an impressive singing actress, but, more valuably, an ensemble performer.

Much about the show itself still seems weak and obvious, but the energy of the powerful cast is so infectious you can't help being carried away by it. Plus, it now has warmth, which has been in short supply on Broadway in recent years. Warmth is what sets Bennett above his Broadway peers, and it's heartening to see he has given *Dreamgirls* his true signature.

Family

What about what I need?
Curtis says its the best thing for
the group.

What about what's best for me?
He feels the Dreams can
crossover.

What about how I feel?
But when we're famous I'll write
great things for ya, Effie do it
for me.

What about me? What about
me?

It's more than you, it is more
than me
No matter what we are, we are
a family

This dream is for all of us, this
one can be real,
and you can't stop us now
because of how you feel.

It's more than you,
It is more than me
Whatever dreams we have,
they're for the family,
we're not alone anymore
now there are others there,
and that dream's big enough for
all of us to share,
so don't think you're going,

you're not going anywhere,
you're staying and taking your
share, and if
you get afraid again, I'll be
there.

We are a family like a giant tree
branching out towards the sky,
we are a family
we are so much more than just
you and I

we are a family like a giant
tree,
growing stronger, growing wiser,
we are growing free..we need
you..we are a family...

Dreamgirls Websites

Dreamgirls- Your Vitruual Coffee Table Book of the Musical
<http://www.grai.ai.com/dreamgirls>

The Broadway Musical Home
<http://www.broadwaymusicalhome.com/shows/dream-girls.htm>

Dreamgirls- The Movie
<http://www.dreamgirlsmovie.com>

General Websites

Internet Broadway Database
www.ibdb.com

Playbill
www.playbill.com

Houston Theatre
www.theatrereport.com

Musicals
www.musicals.net

Musical 101
www.musicasl101.com



Section Six: Supplemental Materials

More Material

Second Review

Hauntings

by John Simon

New York (July 13, 1987)

"...Without the dizzying visual riches that distracted the gaze and mind, the characters thrash about like cardboard puppets..."

When a beautiful woman removes her makeup, she is likely to be just as beautiful. When a homely one removes her makeup, the result is likely to be -- well, like the current revival of *Dreamgirls*. Purporting to be a replica of Michael Bennett's spectacular original production, this is, in fact, the bus-and-truck version of the show with most of its stunning technology gone or drastically reduced. We are now largely dependent on Tom Eyen's book and lyrics and on Henry Krieger's music, which struck me as small potatoes all along.

The show concerns the way Harlem's rhythm and blues was co-opted and toned down into the downtown-disco sound. Inspired (if that's the word) by the stories of Diana Ross and the Supremes, Berry Gordy, James Brown, and some others, *Dreamgirls* tells about a singing group, the Dreamettes, competing on talent night at the old Apollo. They are spotted by Curtis Taylor Jr., an unscrupulous Cadillac salesman, who becomes their agent. He rigs things so that they will lose, turns them into a backup group for the soul singer James Thunder Early, and starts an affair with Effie, the vocally strongest but visually weak (or fattest) of the three, while also exploiting the songwriting skills of C.C., her brother. Lorrell, another Dreamette, gets involved with James, who, through Curtis's nationwide bribing of disc jockeys, climbs the charts with the girls right behind him.

Now Curtis dumps James, whose soul singing is going out of fashion, and starts clandestinely carrying on with Deena, the prettiest of the trio. When Effie finds out and becomes obstreperous (not merely in her singing), Curtis fires her and makes C.C. drop her, too. She is replaced by the comely Michelle. Curtis changes the group's name to the Dreams, and, with a tamer, more homogenized sound and more of his skulduggery, they climb to the top of the charts--thus also betraying C.C.'s art, such as it is. That is about as much plot as you need to know to grasp that we have here a giant gossip column blind item about the selling, in both senses, of soul.

Yet schematic and sensationalist as Eyen's book is, it is still superior to his lyrics: mostly unrhymed, prosaic banalities that state, restate, and re-estate the obvious. But the score -- here comes the kicker -- switches between what the characters perform professionally and what they are thinking and saying in private, with relatively sparse dialogue and much recitative. The trouble with this recitativo -- shall we call it *demisecco*? -- is its musical desiccation, and though it flows seamlessly and cinematically into the set pieces, these, too, suffer from dearth of invention and variety. It may be objected that Motown and other models for the *Dreamgirls* score sound no different, which may, worse luck, be true, but is no excuse.

There was, originally, the brilliantly multifarious and breakneck staging by Michael Bennett, who was too ill to attend to such matters. But part of Bennett's strength was always his choice of collaborators, and two of those -- Bob Avian, as production supervisor, and Michael Peters, the co-choreographer -- are back on the job. They do the best they can, and Theoni V. Aldredge's lush costumes are still on target; other members of the original team, however, have had to shortchange themselves and us. The five celebrated towers studded with swiveling colored spotlights have shrunk in number and size, and are now handpushed instead of moving by disembodied electronic magic. A typical loss occurs in "Steppin' to the Bad Side," where, on bridges ascending beyond the proscenium, rows of dancers acted out, in dramatic backlighting, a huge payola number. Reduced to mere stage level and a handful of dancers, the payola piece doesn't pay off. Several other lavishly designed, staged, and lighted numbers similarly bite the dust of economy required by a truckable production geared to smaller stages and more modest equipment. Tharon Musser's lighting seems less opulent now (Musser's original lighting plot was more intricate than Eyen's plot), and, though still impressive, is far less dazzling.

It has been argued that what the show loses in razzmatazz it gains in warm humanity. But for warm humanity we need fully realized human characters, however fallible and selfish. Deprived of the dizzying visual riches that distracted the gaze and mind from the impoverished clichés of the words and music, the characters now thrash about like those two-dimensional cardboard cutout puppets that lack even the thickness of marionettes. And many of the cast cannot help, either.

As Curtis, Weyman Thompson has little voice and less personality. Mostly he stands there, his face and body curiously concave, a flattened-out version of the debonair and demonic. The other men are weak, too, with the luminous exception of Herbert L. Rawlings Jr., whose James Thunder Early sings, dances, and acts with heart and soul and body, and humor and pathos to spare. For the rest, the women do better, Lillias White, in the key role of Effie, is less tubby than the original's Jennifer Holliday, whose standby she was, and commendably sings rather than caterwauls the showstopper "And I Am Telling You I'm Not Going" (that prosy title line alone, much repeated, should give you an idea of the lyrics), which I found a major relief. As Deena, Alisa Gyse is attractive, though perhaps not quite spirited enough, which is made up for by Arnetia Walker's Lorrell, who is at times rather too much so. Susan Beaubian is adequate in the routine part of Michelle.

But how the show drags on, especially in the second act, deprived now of the glitter of hotels and nightclubs, the recording-studio and backstage frippery and clutter. Robert Graves once suggested that David Copperfield could be greatly shortened and vastly improved just by omitting the word "little" in its manifold appearances. By cutting three words -- "baby," "dream," and "me" -- from *Dreamgirls* at least sometimes, the running time could shed a *mauvais quart d'heure*, and we'd all be better off for it.