

# Musical theatre: a 360° show

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## INTRODUCTION

*“Musical theatre is the latest fad...”*

Every single time I hear this, it just gets on my nerves and I have to cool down before I can even speak. Here in Spain, how dare we say that a cultural expression as rich and complex as musical theatre, which has been incredibly successful in other countries for about a century and a half, is a “fad”? I’m sorry. I just won’t. Musicals are not a fad. Actually, Spanish audiences first enjoyed a musical fifty years ago, when Rodgers and Hammerstein’s hit *South Pacific* was brought to Madrid’s Zarzuela Theatre by José Tamayo.

And then, in the 1970s, Camilo Sesto’s dazzling Jesus Christ Superstar would become something our eyes (and ears) would never forget. The 1980s saw the birth of original Spanish productions, such as *Mar i Cel* (Dagoll Dagom – 1988) or *Carmen, Carmen* (Antonio Gala – 1988).

And finally, in the 1990s, musicals swept the country. Today, if you visit Madrid and don’t treat yourself to one of those spell-binding Broadway hits, well – you might as well never have been there.

No, it’s not a fad. I don’t want it to be. We must not allow it.

## Musical theatre in classrooms.

Musical theatre has everything you could dream of for a first-rate extracurricular activity in schools, high schools and study centres in general. Let’s see:

- **Scripts you simply love.** Sometimes a new story is created for the show, many other times musicals are based on great plays or novels we are already fond of.
- **Staging which will make your creativity soar.** Costumes, sets, lighting – in musicals you can see their full meaning, sometimes creating such a distinctive atmosphere that they become one with the show.
- **Huge casts.** Think of it: how can you stage a play with thirty children in a school? Easy: make a musical! You will need actors for about twelve or fifteen main roles and lots more for the chorus. The final production will look even more impressive!
- **And music, of course!** As the saying goes, music soothes the savage beast. So, if you have good musical numbers and a few catchy songs children and parents should be more than happy, right?

OK, it’s not that simple.

I am afraid that self-indulgence is not uncommon in many of our performing arts teachers. Obvious downsides include overcrowded shows, flagrant playback abuse or sub-par technical elements (microphones, sets, etc.). All leisure, cultural or sports activities must involve learning at all levels – in other words, musical theatre students cannot be asked to learn a few lines but shut up during songs. Should students sing even if they not deliver Grammy-worthy performances, or should they just wave their arms in silence and look “nice” without learning anything? What do we choose, quality or quantity? Does it make sense to run musical theatre workshops for fifty students? Think of a fifty-player football team. With so many people, can children benefit from the activity they signed up for? And what about a guitar workshop? Just imagine that, at the end of the course, all a student could do was, so to speak, “guitar-sync” to an Enrique Granados CD. Ridiculous, right?

Sure, musical theatre has many pros – and, unfortunately, just as many cons.

## OBJECTIVES

### Who is the target audience of this workshop?

This activity is just perfect for two clearly differentiated profiles:

1. **Musical theatre lovers in general.** Anyone wishing to get some insight into musicals, discover all their secrets and just enjoy and feel their energy is more than welcome!
2. **And, more particularly, present or future teachers who may like to run musical theatre workshops in their study centres.** After all, the cons of musical theatre we identified above can be overcome if trainers are trained, a new and more rigorous approach is taken – and, of course, if we understand that musical theatre is anything but a fad.

### What is the objective? Contents and methods.

The workshop comprises **three sub-workshops**, each one focused on a landmark of the genre. The aim is to study these musicals, from a theoretical and practical perspective, and understand how musical theatre works and how it can be applied and properly developed for training purposes at all educational levels:

- **Acting:** ad-libbing, imagination and actors, analysis of a drama scene: the conflict, protagonist vs antagonist, principles of theatre: action-reaction, pace and pause, drama genres, etc.
- **Vocal technique:** speaking and singing voice, phonation, breathing, voice projection, phrasing, musical performance, etc.
- **Stage movement:** dance, body language, non-verbal communication, rhythm, reflexes and organicity, etc.

The first day of each workshop students will get the script and the songs (original songs and music) they will be working on.

## THE WORKSHOPS

Three very different themes, three ways of understanding musicals, three approaches to show business with very distinct themes, aesthetics and techniques. To put it simply, what we offer here is a tasting menu.

The workshop will be divided into three-week modules, one for each musical:

First week – Theory: the musical in its context. Adaptations.

Reading and analysis of the musical or its key scenes.

Work distribution (scenes, songs, etc.)

Other work: ad-libbing and various staging and acting techniques.

Character creation.

Second week – Staging of individual scenes.

Third week – Staging of ensemble musical number.

Working groups will be formed for each workshop and scene unit (a scene unit means a scene + a song).

In chronological order:

***West Side Story* (1957 — Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim).**

William Shakespeare's classic tragedy about the Montague-Capulet feud, first published in 1597, is now set in a vibrant New York in the 1950s, where two rival gangs, the Jets (a white gang) and the Sharks (whose members are immigrants from Puerto Rico), struggle for control of a neighbourhood. Alas, like in the 16th century, love will not be enough to defeat violence and injustice.

**Contents:**

- Musicals inspired by dramatic texts.
- Immigration as a theme in musicals.
- Lyrical technique applied to musical theatre.

**Did you know?**

- This was one of Stephen Sondheim's first works. He would later go on to become one of the most successful composers in modern Broadway.
- The hugely popular "America" was composed during a rehearsal for a costume change for which the actors were late.
- It was originally conceived as a love story between a Catholic boy and a Jewish girl.

**Scenes and musical numbers:**

- "Maria" or "Something is coming" (male solo).
- "I feel pretty" (female solo).
- "One hand, one heart" or "A boy like that" (duet).
- "America" (chorus).
- ...

***Chicago* (1975 — Fred Ebb and John Kander).**

In the 1920s, during the prohibition, dozens of illegal venues pop up all over the capital of Illinois. There, even the boring lives of housewives are shaken up by jazz and debauchery, which will eventually lead them to alcoholism and crimes of passion. But the legal system, rotten to the core, will turn a blind eye if the prettiest criminals agree to do certain favours – until a brutal death row for women is created.

**Contents:**

- The aesthetic musical.
- Sensuality on death row.
- Bob Fosse's unrivalled dancing and storytelling skills.

**Did you know?**

- The musical is based on journalist Maurine Dallas Watkins's play of the same name, published in 1924.
- Besides the musical, there are two previous film versions of the play. The first one was directed by Cecil B. DeMille in 1927. The second one, from 1942, starred Ginger Rogers as Roxie Hart.
- Actress Gwen Verdon read the novel and convinced her husband, dancer and choreographer Bob Fosse, to turn it into a musical.

**Scenes and musical numbers:**

- "Mr. Celophane" or "All I care about is love" (male solo).
- "Roxie" (female solo).
- "Nowadays" (duet).
- "All that Jazz" or "Cell block tango" (chorus).
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### **Mamma Mia (1999 — Benny Andersson and Björn Ulvaeus)**

Sophie is twenty years old and about to marry, but she has a big question: who is her father? Her mother Donna, a former singer who now runs a small rural hotel, closely guards the secret and will not hear a word of it. The bride, undeterred, has three candidates, Javi, Bruno and Samuel, who were her mother's boyfriends when she was a young, foolish girl. The plan looks simple: all three will be invited to her wedding, where Sophie hopes she will find out her father's identity. But, what will happen when Donna is face to face with three men who belonged to her past – the day before her daughter's wedding? Funny, lightweight and life-affirming, this is a delightful contemporary musical featuring ABBA songs.

#### **Contents:**

- The concept of jukebox musical (ABBA, Mecano, Joaquín Sabina, etc.).
- Musicals the other way around: first the music and then, the script.
- Musicals: bridging generations.

#### **Did you know?**

- *Mamma Mia* is not the first musical composed by ABBA's male members. In 1984 they starred in *Chess*, a love story set in the Cold War between the USA and the USSR, featuring original music.
- ABBA initially wanted the musical to pay tribute to the group and tell their story. Lyricist Tim Rice convinced them to do something different.
- Pierce Brosnan did not know the musical but accepted to take part in the film because it starred Meryl Streep.

#### **Scenes and musical numbers:**

- "Dancing Queen" (female trio).
- "Knowing me, knowing you" (duet).
- "Slipping through my fingers" (female solo).
- "The winner takes it all" (female solo).
- "Money, money, money" (chorus).

### **FINAL PERFORMANCE**

After this three-month workshop, the best scenes and musical numbers will be shown to the public, with a previous cast selection. To be consistent with the final production, a micro-musical format is proposed: **a performance at the UA Auditorium with the audience on a 360° stage**. That way, microphones and other technical elements which are normally required in traditional musicals will not be needed.

### **OBJECTIVES**

- Promoting musical theatre culture in educational environments.
- Training future performing arts teachers.
- Enjoying a more and more popular and "cool" activity.
- Understanding a key dramatic genre.

### **ADDRESSED TO:**

- Undergraduates in education, language studies, history... Future teachers.
- Performing arts lovers.

### **METHODS**

- First session: Course presentation.  
Theoretical study of the first musical. **West Side Story**. Distribution of scenes.
- Second session: Rehearsal and staging of individual scenes and duets.

- Third session: Rehearsal and staging of ensemble number: "America".
- Fourth session: Final review of *West Side Story*.  
Theoretical study of the second musical: **Chicago**. Distribution of scenes.
- Fifth session: Rehearsal and staging of individual scenes and duets.
- Sixth session: Rehearsal and staging of ensemble number: "Cell Block Tango".
- Seventh session: Final review of *Chicago*.  
Theoretical study of the third musical: **Mamma Mia!** Distribution of scenes.
- Eighth session: Rehearsal and staging of individual scenes and duets.
- Ninth session: Rehearsal and staging of ensemble number: "Money, money, money".
- Tenth session: Final review of *Mamma Mia!*  
Full rehearsal.
- Eleventh session: Full rehearsal.
- Twelfth session: Dress rehearsal.
- Final performance: 1 or 2 June (Friday or Saturday) are proposed for the final performance.

#### ASSESSMENT

- Attendance: students must attend at least 80% of total course hours.
- Conduct: participation and tasks.
- Final performance.

#### HOUR BREAKDOWN

- From 15 February to 24 May 2019
- Fridays from 6.30 to 9 p.m
- 30 hours -3 credits

- 15 and 22 February
- 1, 8, 15, 22 and 29 March
- 5 and 12 April
- 10, 17 and 24 May

VENUE: Salvador Allende Room (Auditorium patio)

PLEASE NOTE

IN ORDER TO OBTAIN THE COURSE CERTIFICATE, STUDENTS MUST:

\*ATTEND AT LEAST 80% OF TOTAL COURSE HOURS

\*HAVE PAID FOR COURSE FEES

\*PASS TEACHER'S ASSESSMENT TEST

\*COMPLETE COURSE SATISFACTION SURVEY