

Teaching guide: Area of study 4 – Music for theatre

This study guide aims to help teachers prepare students for exam questions on Area of Study 4: Music for Theatre (AoS4). Paramount to the success of any work in this area of study is the understanding that students are studying **music** as opposed to any other facet of the songs, such as lyrics or plot; whilst these other areas are indeed vital for students to consider, the music itself is of primary importance. Students must work to acquire **musical** understanding of their chosen songs. To this end, this study guide aims to place music front and centre, favouring it over analysis of lyrics or intricate biographical information about the five named composers.

Due to copyright reasons, this guide is unable to use notated musical examples or extended lyrics. We appreciate that to understand the music in question and to prepare to write about it in an exam context, notation and lyrics are vital as signposts or examples. Teachers should therefore use this guide in conjunction with sound files and/or scores, fleshing out the information here with clear examples in the same way that students should when studying their chosen repertoire.

Areas for teacher consideration

Choosing an appropriate selection of songs

In an ideal world, students would enter the exam hall with detailed knowledge of numerous songs by each named composer, giving them a true and rich choice of songs with which to answer the 30 mark question. However, in reality, students must be thoughtful in their song choices, ensuring they know enough songs in detail to enable them to answer any question in the exam. A well-chosen song list must include variety – the following questions may aid the formation of a suitable ‘song bank’:

- Does my song bank include songs of different moods (happy, sad, lonely, joyful, excited, frightened etc.)?
- Does my song bank include songs from a variety of points in a show (show openers, mid-show, finales)?
- Does my song bank include songs featuring different combinations of characters (solo songs, duets, ensemble numbers)?
- Does my song bank include songs employing different tempi, metres, instrumental accompaniment, tonal and harmonic palates, rhythmic and melodic features?

It is strongly recommended, partially for the sake of the 10 mark question, that students study something of the work of each named composer during their A-level course, however they may choose to focus on songs by only a limited number of composers in preparation for the 30 mark essay.

Depth of musical analysis

Careful study of the mark scheme reveals that, in order to access the highest marks in the 30 mark essay, students need to know their songs in a high level of detail. Specific musical

details, about all elements of music listed in the A-level specification, should be learned alongside their locations; these could be in the form of bar numbers, time references on the sound file or on which lyric a feature is found.

It is worth noting that, in several cases, multiple versions of the same song exist; *The Ballad of Mack the Knife* is a prime example of this, having been rearranged multiple times, for different productions, since its show was premiered. Several shows have also been turned into successful films, with valuable soundtracks which may aid analysis. In order to offer clarity in an exam essay, it is worth considering which version(s) has been studied and stating this in the essay, thus ensuring that the musical detail a student is making is valid and can be checked by the examiner.

Glossary of analytical questions

Unlike with other areas of study, there are no unique or particularly specialist musical features within the music in AoS4. That said, specific issues should be considered when analysing songs for the theatre, both in the classroom as chosen songs are analysed and in the exam hall when students work on the 10 mark theatre question. Although certainly not exhaustive, the following questions can act as prompts for students as they undertake analytical work for AoS4:

Is the melody syllabic or melismatic?

As with any song, the issue of how many notes are used for each syllable is important. A melody may be wholly syllabic (with one note per syllable), highly melismatic (where more than one note is used per syllable), or a mixture of the two. Syllabic melodies possess a direct, often declamatory nature as each syllable is given its own discrete note, whilst melisma can often offer a word greater emotional and expressive weight.

The majority of lyrics in songs for theatre are set syllabically, offering the small moments of melisma even more value. Songs on the recommended listening list which utilise melisma include *Still Hurting*, from Jason Robert Brown's *The Last Five Years*, where a three-note descending melisma on the word 'hurting' in b.11 (1.03 on the Original Broadway Cast Recording) creates a sighing gesture to evoke Cathy's hurt and pain. Short two- or three-note descending melismas throughout this song have the same effect. In *Oklahoma* from Rodgers' musical of the same name, melisma is found on the words 'say' and 'Yay!' in bb.151-158 (from 2.20 on the 1998 Royal National Theatre Recording), here building joy and excitement as the chorus sing five chords, which rise chromatically, per syllable.

Why are particular melodic contours written?

Melodic lines have the power to clearly evoke different moods, and often theatre composers choose their melodic shapes deliberately to this end. Examples of this from the recommended listening list include:

- The melodic line setting the first three words in Robert Brown's *Still Hurting* descends, suggesting Cathy's despondency as her relationship with Jamie has ended. The same melodic shape, purely conjunctly, can be found with the first three words in Richard Rodgers' *Lonely Room*, depicting Jud's lonely state.
- Overall melodic ascent can be found in bb.19-26 of *Lonely Room* (1.00-1.16 on the 1998 National Theatre Recording) as the tone of the lyrics turns to optimism and hope that Jud's dreams may come true.
- The disjunct melodic shape in bb.22²-24 from the central B minor refrain in *Pirate Jenny* (from Weill's *The Threepenny Opera*) employs an ascending minor sixth and a descending perfect fifth to support the dark and anguished lyrics.

- Repeated pitches are often found in theatre song melodies. In *Lonely Room*, the several instances of four or five repeated pitches in the opening ten bars evoke Jud's loneliness and introspective nature, with this latter effect also being found when the dominant pitch of Eb is sung thirteen times consecutively in bb.3-4 of *Bui-Doi* in Schönberg's *Miss Saigon*.
- Arch-shaped melodic contours in *Oh, What A Beautiful Morning* from Rodgers' *Oklahoma!* add much to the carefree emotion of the singing character, Curley. The opening monophonic melodic line from b.12 descends then ascends over four bars, whilst the chorus melody follows the same shape in an arpeggiated manner. In combination with the $\frac{3}{4}$ metre and, in the chorus, 'bom-ching-ching' accompaniment, these arch-shapes possess a lilt and optimism befitting of the lyrics.

Particularly when dealing with a mood or emotion question, students would benefit from considering what the shape of melody (as a whole or, more likely, phrase-by-phrase) is trying to achieve.

What do unusual harmonic features offer to the song?

There are particular harmonic traits which are found in the work of several of the named theatre composers. These include:

Extended chords – Work by several of the named composers is rich in chords which are extended by adding extra notes to the conventional major or minor triad. These can be chromatic additions, such as the added flattened 6th and flattened 7th on the A^{b67} chord in b.6 of Weill's *Pirate Jenny*, creating a tense feel, or the E^{7b10} chord in b.24 of Robert Brown's *Moving Too Fast*, used as repeated quavers to build within this blues-influenced song of exhilaration. Non-chromatic additions are common also, such as the added 9th, created by the tonic pedal, in the Bb⁹ chord on the third beat of the first bar of Robert Brown's *Still Hurting*.

Bare fifths – The ambiguity created by bare fifths (a chord lacking a third) adds much to several songs on the Recommended Listening List. The use of a bare fifth built on F# (the dominant at this point in the song) in b.24 and b.27 of *Pirate Jenny* (heard from 0.44 on the Original Donmar Warehouse Recording) contributes to the disturbing tone of the lyric about the mysterious black ship. A variation on a bare fifth is found on the final chord of *Lonely Room*, where a ninth is added to a bare fifth on the tonic to create a truly unsettling and ambiguous ending to this turbulent song.

Slash Chords – Several songs employ slash chords; these can either be chords in inversion or, more interestingly, cases where a non-chord note is found in the bass. Both instances can be the result of pedals in the bass or can facilitate a smooth bassline. Slash chords often add a degree of tension, such as the repeating Gm7/F – Gm7/C progression in bb.35-40 (from 1.17 on the Original Broadway Cast Recording) of Sondheim's *Green Finch and Linnet Bird*, creating a conflict between the bass and chordal parts which mirrors that felt by the trapped singer Johanna.

Bitonality – Whilst not frequent in the songs of the five named composers, bitonality can create a jarring harmonic effect. Bb.46-49 of Sondheim's *The Ballad of Sweeney Todd* feature a G minor arpeggio, played by high violins at 1.30 on the original cast recording, over the accompaniment, which is colourfully grounded somewhere between D major and F# minor, to create tension.

What specific roles do different instruments (or singers) play?

As well as examining when each musical line plays, it is worth considering the role played by each. As well as functioning as bassline, melody or chord-based accompaniment figure, other roles include:

Counter melody – Often interjecting during rests or held notes in the vocal melody, counter melodies can enhance the intended mood of a song. The low lilting cello counter melodies in b.16 and b.18 of Robert Brown’s *Still Hurting* (heard from 1.15 on the Original Broadway Cast Recording), for instance, add a lyrical intensity, particularly when played with some vibrato, to enhance the impact of the song.

Doubling melody – Instrumental lines can double the melody, such as in the second verse of *Oklahoma!’s Oh, What A Beautiful Morning* where, from bb.48-59 (1.31-1.44 on the 1998 National Theatre Recording), the harp doubles the melody at higher octaves, offering a light and joyful effect.

Referencing location and other extramusical ideas – Instruments can vividly evoke extramusical ideas, such as the *piano* woodwind lines at the start of Sondheim’s *Green Finch and Linnet Bird* which clearly suggest the birds, both on the stage and in the song’s lyric, with their use of trills, triplets and acciaccaturas. The Asian flute in the seventh bar of the introduction to the Original Cast Recording of *I Still Believe* from *Miss Saigon* suggests Kim’s Vietnamese nationality and location, whilst the choice of piano, a typically Western instrument, as the primary accompanying instrument in the second verse of *I Still Believe* (from 2.05 in the Original Cast Recording) moves us to America from where Ellen sings this verse in the show.

What canvas do the whole-song features create?

Certain musical features – such as tempo, tonality, metre as well as perhaps instrumentation and articulation – offer less chance for detailed, location-specific analytical points, often remaining the same throughout a whole song. These features, however, lay the groundwork for a song, creating a musical canvas onto which more intricate details (such as melodic intervals, chord sequences and specific word painting) can be layered. *I Still Believe* from Schönberg’s *Miss Saigon*, for instance, opens with a combination of the key of D minor, a simple 4/4 metre, legato articulation and an *andante* tempo to create a suitable canvas for Kim and Ellen’s heart-wrenching duet. Conversely, Robert Brown’s *Moving Too Fast* utilises the bright key of A major, a ‘Funky Rock 4, crotchet = 100’ opening marking and a piano-heavy orchestration to allow Jamie’s exuberance to be clearly conveyed.

How do repeated sections of the song differ?

Whilst not always functioning exactly as the verses and choruses of a pop song, many theatre songs naturally divide into different sections which often repeat during a song. Examination of the differences in second and subsequent hearings of the same musical section can highlight useful musical details. The opening eight-bar vocal section of Robert Brown’s *Still Hurting* returns three times during the song; the second time (bb.15-22) is enhanced with a cello counter melody and piano quavers to add more movement, whilst its final recurrence, beginning at b.77 (4.01 on the Original Broadway Cast Recording), uses piano only in the accompaniment, offering a stripped-back and tender moment. Weill’s *Pirate Jenny* employs a strophic structure, with the final repeat, beginning at 1.54 in the Original Donmar Warehouse Recording, taking a slower tempo and adding more frequent accented low chords and a silent GP bar in the accompaniment at 2.49 to add greater drama and suspense.

The named composers

Each named composer makes their unique contribution to the pool of songs which students can study. The following paragraphs seek to offer a general introduction to each composer as well as suggest songs extra to those on the recommended listening list which merit consideration as song banks are built and the work of each composer is studied.

Kurt Weill

The first of the five named composers, Kurt Weill offers a window into a very different type of Music for Theatre to the other four named composers. Rather than writing in American for American audiences, Weill's first phase of theatrical works set German lyrics for audiences in 1920s and 1930s Weimar. Extra consideration must therefore be taken when studying Weill's work, remembering that, for certain songs, the lyrics we have are translations.

Weill's two major theatrical works are:

- *The Threepenny Opera* (German: *Die Dreigroschenoper*), first performed in 1928.
- *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* (German: *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*), first performed in 1930.

Both works set lyrics by Bertolt Brecht, taking a notably satirical tone on societal and ethical issues of the day. In both musicals Weill employs a variety of harmonic language. Some songs are notably simple: *Mack The Knife*, the opening song in *The Threepenny Opera* and arguably Weill's most popular piece, uses only chords I, ii, V and vi in its sixteen-bar repeated refrain. Conversely, *Pirate Jenny*, from the same show, employs chromatic extended chords, unexpected harmonic progressions and ambiguous harmonic writing (such as the bare fifths discussed above).

Other songs by Kurt Weill feature diverse harmonic writing akin to that found in *Pirate Jenny*. Some of these worth further attention are:

The Bilbao Song, from *Happy End*. Another German-language collaboration by Weill and Brecht, *Happy End*'s initial production in Berlin only ran for seven performances, although subsequent productions have seen more success. *The Bilbao Song* is an example of an ensemble number, sung by a group of male criminals who reminisce about (to quote the lyrics) 'Bill's beer hall in Bilbao...the most fantastic place I've ever known'. The song vividly evokes beer hall songs from the German lands with its stride piano accompaniment, chromatic chords and simple syllabic melody, featuring several flattened notes and repeated phrases to perhaps suggest inebriated singing. The song possesses a joy and a charm which make it attractive for A-level study.

Other songs from *Happy End* worthy of attention are:

- *The Liquor Dealer's Dream* – an entertaining ensemble number, sung dietetically at a Mission Hall, about a fictitious alcohol seller's fate after confronting death. Contrasting musical sections, employing different metres, tell the story clearly.
- *The Mandalay Song* – the opening song in Act III, this song is performed in Bill's Beer Hall by several of the main characters, employing a fast tempo, alternating minor-major tonality, rapid syllabically-sung words and tonic-dominant bassline to create its dark yet comical tone.
- *Surabaya Johnny* – a female solo sung by Lillian as she implores Bill to resist returning to his life of crime.

Lonely House, from *Street Scene*. Written for, in its composer's words, an 'American opera', this solo song fuses the lyricism of an operatic aria with vivid storytelling and musical characteristics of jazz and blues. Sung in the show by isolated teenager Sam Kaplan, the

piece opens with a bare fifth, the upper note of which then rises and falls chromatically in crotchets to set the moody atmosphere. This is compounded by three staccato quaver chords, comprising a dissonant minor second interval only, in b.2 and a high-pitch melodic line in b.3 which employs syncopation, triplets and a jazzy chromatic descent to end. Rich chromatic extended chords feature extensively in this piece, as do repeated pitches in the vocal melody and evocative dynamics.

September Song is now a popular jazz standard in its own right, but this song originated in Weill's 1938 musical *Knickerbocker Holiday*, the lyrics for which were written by Maxwell Anderson. A solo sung by the character Peter Stuyvesant, the aging director-governor of New Netherland on the east coast of America in the mid-1600s, this song features a gentle melody line with extended jazz chords and generous use of the tonic and subdominant minor chord to set its reflective, romantic lyrics.

Richard Rodgers

Richard Rodgers is a key figure in what has come to be known as a 'golden age' of American musicals. The 1940s and 50s saw the creation of numerous sumptuous, large-scale shows, many of which were turned into Hollywood blockbusters. With lyricist Oscar Hammerstein II, Richard Rodgers composed music to many of these, with arguably the most enduring and successful being:

- *Oklahoma!* (1943)
- *Carousel* (1945)
- *South Pacific* (1949)
- *The King and I* (1951)
- *The Sound of Music* (1959)

Numerous other shows can be found in Rodgers' canon, with lyrics by Hammerstein or his earlier writing partner Lorenz Hart. Certainly, the later shows are characterised by their rich orchestrations and memorable melodies, often using carefully-crafted motifs and conservative tonal harmony (with chromaticism used for dramatic effect). As well those from *Oklahoma!* and *Carousel* on the Recommended Listening List, Rodgers' songs offer numerous possibilities for A-level analysis, with certain genres of songs being observable:

Light hearted songs:

All featuring a certain buoyancy (created by quick tempi, major tonalities and memorable melodic motifs using notes of short duration), the following songs possess similar functions in their shows by providing moments of joy and relief, even though there is sometimes an underlying sadness:

- *The Lonely Goatherd* from *The Sound of Music*
- *The Farmer and the Cowhand Should Be Friends* from *Oklahoma!*
- *There is Nothing like a Dame* from *South Pacific*
- *I'm Gonna Wash That Man* from *South Pacific*
- *How Do You Solve A Problem* from *The Sound of Music*
- *I Can't Say No* from *Oklahoma!*
- *Western People Funny* from *The King and I*

Romantic songs:

The following all employ reasonably-slow tempi, sweeping legato melodic lines and rich harmony (often using subtle chromatic chords such as augmented and diminished triads) to evoke romance:

- *If I Loved You* from *Carousel*
- *People Will Say We're In Love* (and its reprise in Act II) from *Oklahoma!*
- *Younger Than Springtime* from *South Pacific*
- *Some Enchanted Evening* from *South Pacific*
- *Something Good* from *The Sound of Music*
- *Hello Young Lovers* from *The King and I*

Inspirational songs:

Whilst similar in character and musical style to the Romantic Songs above, the lyrical tone and emotional effect of these songs is to inspire and persuade in some way; as such, each song possess an epic quality enhanced at points by rits and pauses:

- *Climb Every Mountain* from *The Sound of Music*
- *You'll Never Walk Alone* from *Carousel*
- *Something Wonderful* from *The King and I*

Songs of encouragement:

All led by a female singer and sung to, sometimes also with, children, the following songs all possess a warmth and wholesome quality as the characters seek to resolve or address a problem.

- *Do Re Mi* from *The Sound of Music*
- *My Favourite Things* from *The Sound of Music*
- *I Whistle a Happy Tune* from *The King and I*
- *Getting To Know You* from *The King and I*

Examination of the specific musical features of any of these songs, asking the analytical questions above (as well as others) in conjunction with study of the lyrics, will help students explore Rodgers' musical style and the value of these songs. Other songs are of course worth attention, with *Bali Ha'i* from *South Pacific* proving to be particularly noteworthy in its evocation of the traditional Melanesian peoples and culture. The opening two bars feature a staccato C major chord, with a middle C being sustained whilst Mary's conjunct vocal line begins. This creates something of the mysticism and intensity of the South Pacific culture, as does the chromatic Bb – C – D – C – D chord progression in bb.3-4. The rising octave interval, followed by a descending minor second to rest on the raised subdominant degree of the scale, on the words 'Bali Ha'i' at the start of the chorus adds further to the mysterious, enticing mood of this song, as does the way this distinctive motif is developed alongside the harp and flute arpeggios in the chorus.

Stephen Sondheim

The first of the five named composers who wrote his own lyrics, Stephen Sondheim is perhaps the figurehead for a 'new age' of musical theatre beginning in the mid-1960s, with shows tackling grittier and more diverse subject matters. His lyrics are particularly clever and intricate, with subtle, often internal, rhyme schemes and witty wordplay. Sondheim's

catalogue reads as a diverse collage of creative and colourful shows; as well as the two shows with songs on the Recommended Listening List – the unusually dark *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* and the imaginative fairy tale-fusion *Into the Woods* – the following shows, and songs therein, may well be of interest to A-level students:

A Little Night Music is based on a 1955 Swedish film by Ingmar Bergman and examines romantic relationships in the Swedish upper-class c.1900. To connote the show's time period and opulent lifestyles of the central characters, the score is explicitly waltz-infused, with most of the pieces being written in triple time (either simple or compound). There is an elegance to this musical, offered by the lilting triple metres as well as the quintet of singers who act as a Greek chorus, interjecting throughout the show with quasi-operatic musical offerings.

Send in the Clowns is undoubtedly the most well-known song from this show, and perhaps even from Sondheim's entire oeuvre. Its small vocal range and short melodic phrases betray the fact that it was written for Glynis Johns, the original Desiree, who was not a confident singer. Nonetheless, the song's rich monophonic clarinet opening, 9/8 metre, Db major key and gentle rolling quavers combine with the short melodic phrases to create a song of great poignancy. The move to the mediant minor in the middle section of the song, and ensuing chromatic descent in the bass from b.21, adds to this further. *Every Day a Little Death* possesses just as much sadness and yearning and *Send in the Clowns*; sung by Charlotte, the sidelined yet devoted wife of Count Carl-Magnus, this song combines a lilting 6/8 metre with a simple, syllabic melody line, which employs several disjunct intervals, to depict Charlotte's hopeless state. A flowing yet imaginative harmonic scheme adds colour to this simple yet affecting song.

Songs of humour are plentiful in this musical also. *Now* is sung near the start of the show by Fredrick, a middle-aged man who, at this point, is trying to fashion a plan to encourage his very young wife to sleep with him. Extended quaver runs in the vocal melody enhance the compound duple metre and quick tempo, as does the opening quaver accompaniment figure which could easily exist in a 3/4 metre, unsettling the stability of the piece somewhat. *In Praise of Women* offers a glimpse into Count Carl-Magnus's misogynistic mindset, with bombastic brass chords, the use of diminished and augmented triads and scotch snap rhythms in the vocal line creating a militaristic mood befitting of this military dragoon. A more lyrical middle section, with its conjunct and *legato* melody line and syncopated bass note on the second beat of each bar, offers contrast. *Liasons* offers the ancient Madame Armfeldt a chance to reminisce on the colourful romances of her youth by using a 3/2 metre, evocative extended chords (such as the opening C^{7 9 11}) in minims and, later in the song, descending quintuplet runs. *A Weekend in the Country*, which closes Act I, is an adventurous ensemble number, gradually growing in complexity as more and more characters sing, in sections of homophony and exciting polyphony.

Follies is set in 1971 and follows the reunion of a group of ex-showgirls who gather together one final time before their old theatre is demolished. In this show, Sondheim openly pastiches Broadway, writing songs which reflect the theatre-related desires, professions and attitudes of the characters. Such songs include:

- *Who's That Woman? (Mirror, Mirror)* – an impressive and bombastic ensemble showpiece about female self-perception, featuring an extended tap-dancing sequence and sung by the group of ex-chorus girls.
- *Broadway Baby* – a female solo articulating an actress's desperation to be in a 'great big Broadway show', this song is layered over two other songs in its closing bars and uses grand idiomatic gestures, such as *forte* brass chords on beats 2 and 4 and bluesy chromaticism, to evoke the grandeur of Broadway.
- *Losing My Mind* – a yearning lament of unrequited love, which has become something of an addiction, sung by Sally during the show's imaginary final section.

- *The Ballad of Lucy and Jesse* – a toe-tapping number featuring a plethora of dotted, syncopated and triplet rhythms, this intelligent and allegorical song uses the characters of dissatisfied women (Lucy and Jesse) to show Phyllis’s own discontentment with her life and personality traits.

Company is a non-chronological musical centred around the 35th birthday of single man Bobby (who was recently made into female Bobbie in Marianne Elliott’s 2019 London revival) and his relationship with five sets of his married friends and three of his love interests. Most songs focus on different aspects of relationships:

- *Being Alive* – the final song in the show, sung by Bobby, uses a repeating accompaniment figure in the second half of each bar and a gradual rise of dynamics, vocal tessitura and instrumental participation to articulate Bobby’s unexpected desire to take the risk of committing to a faithful relationship.
- *The Ladies Who Lunch* – a dry and witty song of mockery and sarcasm about middle-aged women who waste their lives, this song is a slow bossa nova with a slow introduction and clear syllabic melody over a syncopated accompaniment.
- *Getting Married Today* – along with interjections from the chorus, this song reveals soloists Paul and Amy’s feelings on the morning of their wedding. Musical contrast is used effectively, with stately, major passages showing Paul’s joy and commitment contrasting the pattering, frenetic passages revealing Amy’s doubts.
- *You Could Drive a Person* – a female trio, sung by Bobby’s three love interests, using a quick tempo, tonic-dominant bassline and 1950s-style close harmony (akin to that of The Andrews Sisters) to articulate the singer’s frustration at Bobby’s inability to commit to a relationship.

Merrily We Roll Along is a tragic tale of fame versus friendship which is told in reverse, ending with three naïve friends dreaming about their future and beginning with their fraught and fractured friendship twenty years later. Songs include:

- *Our Time* – a haunting and poignant ensemble number using a memorable recurring octave-interval quaver motif, broken-chord accompaniment and distinctive syncopated melodic in the chorus to suggest the naivety and hope of the main characters.
- *The Blob* – an exciting and fast-moving ensemble number, featuring polyphonic vocal textures and comical minor second intervals, about ‘the Blob’ of elite and glamorous members of the New York cultural scene.
- *Franklin Shepherd, Inc.* – a comical outpouring of angst and frustration by Charley towards his creative partner Frank, this high-energy male solo features an almost *moto perpetuo* semiquaver accompaniment and a virtuosic vocal part featuring large leaps and fast syllabic singing.

Of course, the two shows included in the Recommended Listening List contain many more songs worth attention. A particularly interesting song from *Sweeney Todd* is ***By The Sea***. Sung by Mrs Lovett but with occasional interjections by Sweeney himself, this humorous insight into Mrs Lovett’s internal desires can, for A-level purposes, be seen as a duet, a character study and a song displaying a vast array of emotions from hope and love to, due to its unrealistic and somewhat satirical tone, deep sadness. In the song’s introduction, the bright key of A major, upbeat tempo, ascending harp glissando in the opening seconds and the quaver accompaniment create a palpable energy, while many metre changes and the use of short breath-like rests to separate the vocal phrases connotes Mrs Lovett’s excitement. The song’s main two-bar instrumental motif begins at b.13 (13 seconds on the Original Broadway Cast Recording) and is characterised by its use of staccato articulation, syncopation in the bass and use of diatonic chords with added notes (such as the D^{maj7} at the end of b.14) to elicit feelings of joy and exhilaration. Mr Todd’s vocal interjections, such

as at 1.18 in the aforementioned recordings, are short and generally use a static or descending contour, showing his lack of interest in Mrs Lovett's dreams. The modulation from A major to Db major in b.63 is extremely foreign, adding a quirky quality, whilst Mrs Lovett's 'hoo hoo' in b.66 (1.25 seconds) is sung onomatopoeically, like a bird call, to a descending perfect 4th interval. In the original score, this entertaining song ends with four tonic chords played to the famous 'Here comes the bride' rhythm, endorsing the lyric's ideas of the love and faithfulness which Mrs Lovett craves.

Claude-Michel Schönberg

This French composer collaborated with lyricist Alain Boublil on his two most successful musicals:

- *Les Misérables*, first performed in 1980.
- *Miss Saigon*, first performed in 1989.

Both musicals are rich in potential for A-level analysis, being sung-through with no extended spoken dialogue and containing many memorable and emotionally-charged songs. *Miss Saigon* fuses American and Vietnamese culture as it retells the story of Puccini's opera *Madame Butterfly*, set in the 1970s amidst the tumultuous end of the Vietnam war.

Alongside the three intense and emotive songs on the Recommended Listening List are others which are particularly vivid in terms of location, character and plot. *The Heat is on in Saigon*, the second song in the show, evokes the frivolity of the group of US Marines enjoying an evening in a Saigon brothel. Specifically, this is achieved by the unison, male-only, syllabic first section of singing, beginning with energised syncopation after a quaver rest and ending with a syncopated crotchet, whilst the flattened seventh on the words 'on in Sai' and, on the Original Cast Recording, the use of saxophones, horns and a rhythm section (with a prominent electric guitar part) add an excited jazzy quality to the song. The female vocals, beginning at 1.20 on the Original Cast Recording, are married with sparser accompaniment, including arco strings to create a contrasting mood, and preceded by general pause bars to herald new characters entering the action; similarly, bb.85-98 (2.29 – 2.55 on the Original Cast Recording) include changes in key, to B major, and articulation, to legato, alongside use of *piano*, arco strings and oriental flute to suggest the innocence, naivety and nationality of its singing character. This song is full of contrast and vibrancy, making it a viable and useful student for A-level study.

Other songs from *Miss Saigon* include:

The Morning of the Dragon – a foreboding, intense chorus number - featuring much chromaticism and changes of metre as well as militaristic rhythms and instrumentation – reflecting on the end of the Vietnam War and reunification of the country.

Sun and Moon – a passionate duet sung as Chris and Kim fall in love. Additive rhythms and colourful orchestration offer this song a sweeping romanticism.

The American Dream – an imaginative monologue sung by The Engineer as he considers an alternative life for himself in America. Contrasting musical ideas and sections, fusing Vietnamese and American musical ideas, make this song particularly vivid and disturbing.

Les Misérables takes Victor Hugo's epic 1862 novel as its stimulus, following the lives, and deaths, of its many characters against the backdrop of the French Revolution in Paris. Intense, reflective female character studies are found in the songs *I Dreamed a Dream* and *On My Own*, both of which utilise legato articulation and climactic sections towards the end. Male solos employing the same musical features include *Stars* and *Empty Chairs at Empty Tables*, both of which also utilise a tertiary modulation for extra dramatic weight. The delicate duet *A Little Fall of Rain* and similarly intimate trio *A Heart Full of Love* offer A-level students the chance to examine the interplay between two or three solo singers whose melody lines switch between functioning independently, in homophony or in counterpoint.

Les Misérables also features several characterful chorus numbers. *At The End Of The Day*, immediately following the show's prologue, vividly sets the scene of an Parisian factory in 1823 with its quadruple compound metre, minor tonality, *Molto Allegro* tempo and declamatory, syllabic, melody sung in unison by a chorus of 'the poor'. *Drink With Me*, found partway through Act II, is far more mellow in tone, employing the key of F major, legato articulation and a descending arpeggio as the first melodic phrase to connote feelings of reflection and comradeship; these are heightened as the song continues with more colourful harmony (such as the minor subdominant chord in b.16) and the antiphonal texture, heard as each short melodic phrase, sung by the men, is immediately echoed by the female chorus, from b.35.

For A-level purposes, *Do You Hear The People Sing* can act as a prime example of a finale, an ensemble number and a song rich in emotions of hope, unity, perseverance and determination. Dotted rhythms and triplets give the syllabic melody drive and purpose, enhanced further with marching crotchet chords in the accompaniment. Several prominent perfect cadences at the ends of phrases and sections provide the song with strength, whilst the wind doubling the melody in sixths (at 0.56-0.58 on the Original Cast Recording) and the SATB harmony at 1.30 on this same recording add to this further. Of particular interest are the final five bars of the piece when a 5/4 metre and unexpected chord sequence (of C – Cm – Ab/C – Cm), alongside a distinct dotted rhythm and accented descending bassline, undercut the determination and power of the song with a jolt back to the dark and unpredictable nature of life, as witnessed throughout this tragic musical.

Master of the House also provides a valuable chorus number for A-level work. Fronted by the secondary comedy characters, the greedy and thieving innkeepers Monsieur and Madame Thénardier, this song's simple duple metre, 'bom-ching-bom-ching' accompaniment (which can be better expressed in an exam essay with a short notated illustration) and tonic-minor-to-tonic-major tonal shifts create a sense of buoyancy and humour. The syncopation in the first bar of sung melody (with the second note falling on the offbeat after a semiquaver-long first word) adds to this, as does the countermelodic interjections (such as the pitch-bending saxophone line, with mischievous chromatic descent, at 0.13 in the Original London Cast Recording).

Jason Robert Brown

The most recently born composer of the five, Jason Robert Brown's first major work, *Songs for a New World*, was premiered Off-Broadway in 1995. This piece, for which (as with all of his songs) he also wrote the lyrics, lies somewhere between a song cycle and musical, constituting a series of discrete songs (sung by different combinations of the show's four singers) which are all abstractly linked by themes of momentary-choice and decision-making. The original production featured a theatrical set (resembling something of a playground-esque ship) and, within the show's structure, some theatrical conventions can be observed, such as there being two acts, each opening and closing with an ensemble number. Taking strong influence from jazz and popular music, every song in this show would make fascinating study at A-level, for instance:

- *On the Deck of a Spanish Sailing Ship, 1492* – a gospel-influenced song sung by 'Man 1' who, at this point, takes the role of a Captain of a ship who sings to the Lord about the fate of his passengers. The opening four bars each contain one spread chord in the piano (moving from Fm^{7,9,11} via Db^{maj7,9,11} and Gb^{maj7,9,13} to a concluding Fm⁹ chord), with the carefully-chosen complex chords, high tessitura and specific, open chord spacing creating a magical, epic quality. The slow tempo, bare accompaniment and delicate use of percussion from b.5 (0.11 on the World Premiere Recording) ensue, with chromatic stab chords in b.15 (1.00 on the recording) under a high held Bb in the vocal line adding passion. Homophonic interjections from the other three cast members (such as at b.35, heard at 2.13 on the recording) add sonorous colour as well as offering A-level students an extra angle of analysis as other singers contribute to this intense and atmospheric

song. Of particular note is the section beginning at b.95 (5.23 on the recording) where four-part close harmony is sung with only drum kit as accompaniment, creating a contemporary and exciting section of music.

- *Just One Step* – this solo song, performed by ‘Woman 2’, possesses a tragically comic tone as it sung by a woman who has climbed out of her apartment window in an attempt to gain the attention of her husband, Murray. The opening monophonic bassline, featuring the flattened supertonic and a syncopated dominant pitch, evokes the character’s nerves and energy, which are further suggested by the use of a prolonged dominant seventh chord when the singing begins. The words, and their underpinning emotion and situation, are enhanced further during the song by the use of a jazz horn section (featuring sax improvisation), accented stab chords, syncopation in the melody, dominant pedals and incredibly fast singing using repeated quavers.
- *The Steam Train* – here, ‘Man 1’ plays the part of a teenager from New York who, despite a poor upbringing, has dreams of becoming a baseball star. The drum-only opening, featuring repeated quavers and pulsating syncopated rhythms, evokes something of the streets of New York whilst the high-tessitura syllabic vocal line displays the character’s self-confidence. Once again, the other three singers join as the song progresses, sometimes singing in octaves but, at other points, singing in homophonic and imitative textures. The use of spoken dialogue and a reprise of material from the show’s opening song add variety to this high-energy and stylised song.
- *Surabaya-Santa* – the performance direction of ‘Weill-esque’ on the sheet music to this song makes its references to the music of Kurt Weill unmissable. The song’s title and lyrical tone clearly acknowledges *Surabaya Johnny* from *Street Scene* (discussed above), whilst the opening piano passage, with bass notes on beats 1 and 3 and differing patterns of chordal quavers in the right hand on the weaker beats, evokes the chordal accompaniments found in many of Weill’s work, such as *Pirate Jenny*. This song is sung by a bitter and resentful Mrs Santa Claus who sings of the neglect she suffers at the hands of her husband ‘Nick’. Melodramatic musical gestures (such as several pauses, a declamatory syllabic vocal melody, descending perfect fifth intervals sung to elongated minims and a modulation up a semitone) combine to make this an ‘over-the-top’ yet devastating and impressive theatrical showpiece.
- *Christmas Lullaby* - a song of purity and innocence sung by a woman who has recently discovered she is pregnant. Lyrical comparisons between the singer and the Virgin Mary add an extra layer of interest to this song, which takes a gentle piano accompaniment featuring many arpeggiated chords (which often include notes extra to the simple triad) and a lyrical, *legato* melody line to create its beguiling and beautiful character.

When thinking about studying these songs, students should carefully consider the fact that this show has no definite narrative. Whilst each song certainly displays vivid character-driven emotion, these characters are not in the context of a wider plot; this may pose difficulties with specific 30 mark essay questions, but the fact that the whole show has a theme and songs are positioned carefully within the cycle could be used to help counter this potential issue.

The other musicals for which Jason Robert Brown is the sole composer are:

- *Parade*: a large-scale show set in 1913 telling the tragic true story of American Leo Frank’s false accusation, and trial, for killing one of his young female factory workers.
- *The Last Five Years*: a sung-through saga of the five-year relationship between twentysomethings Jamie and Cathy.
- *13*: a coming-of-age musical. Using a cast of teenagers alone, telling the story of Evan Goldman as he prepares for his Bar Mitzvah whilst navigating the social pressures of moving to a new town following his parents’ divorce.

- *The Bridges of Madison County*: an adaptation of Robert James Waller's 1992 novella about a lonely Italian woman's extramarital affair with an American photographer.
- *Honeymoon in Vegas*: an adaptation of the 1992 comedy film of the same name.

Each of these shows bear Robert Brown's unique style and contains songs worth analysis at A-level, with the two shows with songs on the Recommended Listening List offering many other songs of value. An example of this is *Shiksa Goddess*, the second song (and Jamie's first song, told at the start of 'his story') from *The Last Five Years*. Beginning in the bright key of A major with a syncopated two-bar piano idea (comprising a conjunct, arch-shaped melodic idea, the notes of which are juxtaposed with a repeating inverted dominant pedal), this song vividly evokes Jamie's naïve and wild excitement at the start of his relationship with Cathy. The rhythmic writing of the first sung lines (featuring triplets and much syncopation) depict this further, as does the unpredictable melodic shape of the opening nine bars of singing, sung mostly over a tonic pedal. In b.31, a new melodic motif begins, rising with declamatory, syllabic on-beat quavers before falling to end over a bluesy D7 chord on b.33¹. This two-bar motif is repeated and developed in the following bars, leading, via a surprising chromatic variant of a dim7 chord in b.43, to a climatic high F# on the word 'hey' on the first beat of b.45, clearly connoting Jamie's delight. Further analysis of this song will reveal how many extended chords, complex syncopation and development of music material combine to portray Jamie's life situation.

Links to composition

To enhance their understanding of Music for Theatre and/or lead to the creation of one, or both, of their final A-level compositions, students may benefit from undertaking mini-compositional exercises linking to AoS4. Such possible exercises include:

- Composing a melody, or more fleshed-out piece with piano (or other) accompaniment, setting lyrics from songs by the named theatre composers.
- Develop a melody or musical idea from one of the songs by the named composers. For instance, students could compose a new melodic line to be underpinned by the additive rhythm accompaniment from the start of Schönberg's *I Still Believe*, or students could use the traditional Dies Irae motif (used in *The Ballad of Sweeney Todd*) as the basis of a new piece.
- Particularly to aid understanding of part-writing, harmony and textural layering, students to re-arrange a song by one of the named composers for an instrumental/vocal combination of their choice.
- Students could compose an instrumental or vocal piece with the same mood or dramatic intention as one of their chosen theatre songs. For instance, students could compose a piece which, like *O What a Beautiful Morning*, depicts a joyful start to the day.

Students could compose a new song which could be used in one of their chosen shows, perhaps articulating a specific moment in the show or the feelings of a particular character at a specific point.