

Becoming a Broadway Music Director

John Andrew Tarbet

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Abstract

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The work of a Broadway music director is complex and requires a wide range of musical and extra-musical skills. Using three research questions, this dissertation investigates (1) what it is that a music director does, (2) how they learn to do various components of the job while at the same time navigating the pathway that leads to Broadway and (3) what is needed to maintain a career on Broadway. A review of literature reveals that peer-reviewed publications are practically silent on the topic of Broadway music directors. Answers to the first question are found in published literature, but a consensus definition does not emerge. Meanwhile, answers to the second and third questions are only indirectly addressed by the literature. This lack of information is a primary argument in favor of this study. The answers to these questions are explored using qualitative research methods to examine what individuals with real-world experience have to say about working as a music director on Broadway. The findings include a description of the necessity for piano skills, the importance of networking, the invaluable learning experience that comes from “being in the room,” and a need for resilience to overcome the challenges of working as a freelancer. Using the framework of the Theory of Expertise, important milestones and stages that Broadway music directors have navigated in their careers are discussed. Finally, barriers to entry into the field are identified along with a description of pipelines that are being built to help the next generation of aspiring music directors achieve success.

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J.A.T.

Dedication

Dedicated to my mother, Karen Lou Richardson Tarbet (1942-2023).

Chapter 1: Introduction

The Music Director¹ of a Broadway show is the one member of the creative team who is regularly seen by audiences. Audiences do not see the director or choreographer doing their work, but they do see the music director—in their role as principal conductor—leading live performances up to eight times a week. However, the job description includes much more than conducting the orchestra (a demanding job all on its own). For example, they manage all aspects of the music in a production; they are involved in casting decisions; they teach the music to both the on stage performers and the musicians in the orchestra pit; they lead brush-up and put-in rehearsals during the run of a show; they act as a vocal coach for the singers; they might create orchestrations (or orchestral reductions), vocal arrangements, or dance arrangements; and as the size of Broadway orchestras shrink due to budgetary constraints (Meffe, 2011), they are often asked to play an instrument (usually a digital piano or synthesizer) while at the same time conducting the pit orchestra. Beyond this long list of musical responsibilities, the music director also plays a managerial role as a member of the creative leadership team and is involved in planning meetings, hiring/firing decisions and other administrative tasks such as payroll or approval of substitute players for the orchestra. Needless to say, the job of a Broadway music director is complex and requires a wide range of skills. This begs the question: how do they master the variety of skills needed for the job? What pathways do they take in order to develop those skills? Moreover, what must they do maintain a trajectory of career development? In short, how does a Broadway music director *learn* how to do it?

¹ Another title, Music Supervisor, is also used in Broadway productions to denote the individual who is in charge of the music department. A more detailed look at these titles is presented in Chapter 5.

1.1 Narrative

In 2008, I submitted my resume for a job listed on the Playbill.com website (<https://playbill.com/>) which advertised an opening for a keyboard player for a national tour of the musical *Peter Pan*. I was invited to audition. If hired, I would play piano for rehearsals in New York City and then go on the road with the show playing keyboard 2 in the pit orchestra (the music director would be conducting and playing from keyboard 1). There were two people in the room for my audition: the music director and the orchestra contractor (or orchestra coordinator). They had me sit at a piano and play a few excerpts from the score, including some of the underscoring composed for Tinkerbell's cues. Prior to this audition, I had been the music director for multiple productions of a condensed version of *Peter Pan* with elementary school aged children in my work with an after-school performing arts organization. This meant that I was somewhat familiar with the score—but not the entirety of the score. A lot of material is cut from the junior version to bring the length of the show down to one manageable hour. My previous experience with the junior version served me well for the audition. I was able to play, with ease, every excerpt that they put in front of me—including the whimsical, yet challenging, Tinkerbell cues, which are solos for celeste.

The next morning, I received a phone call that changed my life. I got the gig! The catch: rehearsals would begin the following Monday, just a few days later. I gave my employer just one day of notice (at the time I was working in the mechanical licensing office for a large music publishing company). The next three weeks felt like a whirlwind with rehearsals in New York City while also making preparations to leave my apartment and live on the road for more than six months.

The short turnaround from my audition to the first day of rehearsal meant that I did not have much time to practice playing the entire score. I was “sight reading for my life” those first days of rehearsal. Thankfully, I did well. The music director complimented me and the rehearsals ran smoothly. I was especially anxious, however, to get my hands on—and practice—the actual keyboard 2 part (I was playing from the piano/conductor score in rehearsals). Meanwhile, an orchestrator was hard at work during those weeks creating an orchestral reduction for the touring pit orchestra. The various instrumental parts were not finished until just prior to the first orchestra rehearsal. Thus, the first time I saw the actual keyboard 2 book was on that first day of orchestra rehearsals—I had no time to practice. I was again “sight-reading for my life.” Not only was I sight-reading the music on the page, but I was also navigating the patch changes on the keyboard (changes in sounds as noted in the keyboard 2 book) by using a foot pedal to advance through the many sounds in a pre-programmed sequence. It was a lot to take in and do because I had never operated changes of sound in such rapid succession. As a result, I made mistakes. The orchestra contractor pulled me aside (he had been observing the orchestra rehearsals) and told me that I needed to calm down and relax and just play. He reminded me how well I had done in the audition and throughout rehearsals. He explained that they wanted me to succeed. I think he sensed my nervousness, and he knew that this was my first professional theater gig. His words reassured me and helped me get through that stressful time.

Once the rehearsal process was over, we hit the road. The production traveled to cities all across the United States and Canada. It was thrilling to perform, live, with a big show in front of an audience night after night. About one month into the tour, we had our first “layoff” period (i.e. no performances scheduled for a week), so we came back to New York City to enjoy some time off. During that week off, I received a phone call from the company manager (the person

who manages all personnel and financial matters for a production). He told me that the music director would be leaving the show and he wondered if I felt up to the task of taking over as music director. While I was excited for the opportunity—and I said “yes” immediately—the reality was that I had never been the music director for a professional production. Prior to that tour, the extent of my experience with musical theater had been with amateur school and community productions. On top of that, my music training had primarily focused on the performance of western classical music as a pianist and choral conductor. I had studied musical theater—but as a songwriter, not as music director or performer. I had to learn quickly how to be the music director while also gaining the trust and respect of everyone else involved in the production.

The night of my first performance as the new music director, I had just two hours of rehearsal time with the orchestra and actors to go over any parts of the show that I would want to work on. The idea being that I could focus on those moments in the show that I was nervous about conducting. That rehearsal time also gave me a chance to fix some musical issues that I wanted to address. A voice in my head told me that I needed to take charge and demonstrate that I was up to the task. So, I focused on some of the tricky transitions that I would need to cue as the conductor. I also worked with the cast to fix a few things that I did not think were sounding good in performance. Looking back on that day, two things stand out to me: First, I remember the look of satisfaction on the company manager’s face. I could tell that he was pleased with the way I took charge, ran the rehearsal, and conducted the show that night. I could sense that he was able to relax and feel good about the decision to promote me to music director (I was an untried entity up to that point). The second distinct memory from that night came after the performance when the bass player in the orchestra turned to me and excitedly said, “Now, that’s the way it’s

supposed to sound!” Meaning that he felt my musical leadership had helped the orchestra members to synch up in ways that had not been possible in our previous performances.

In subsequent years, as I have spoken with other music directors, I have learned that my story is not unique. These other music directors did not specifically train for the job in their university studies nor in their formal music lessons. In fact, until fairly recently the option to major in music directing for theater was only offered by a few select universities. I am curious, therefore, to explore the experiences of music directors from a pedagogical point of view. What lessons might be learned by comparing the pathways that Broadway music directors have taken in order to develop the skills needed to obtain and keep jobs in professional theater? Might not such knowledge be of benefit to future, aspiring music directors?

1.2 Background and Rationale

Given the highly specialized and complex nature of the work done by music directors, this study proposes to “construct knowledge” (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2018, p. 2) through interviews with individuals who have reached the apex of the field. That is, music directors who have worked on Broadway productions in New York City. For the purpose of this study, a Broadway musical is defined as one that meets the three criteria for Tony² award eligibility: (1) the show is originally produced in one of the Theater Wing or Broadway League theaters in New York City (2) with at least 500 seats in the audience and (3) that abides by an Actors’ Equity “production” contract. (American Theater Wing, n.d.).

Brinkmann and Kvale (2018) argue that one purpose of an interview is to construct knowledge through “the inter-action between the interviewer and the interviewee” (p. 2). This

² Formerly known as the Antoinette Perry Awards, the Tonys are awarded annually by the American Theater Wing. <https://www.tonyawards.com/>

type of research seems ideal for the present study, especially given the fact that not much has been written on the topic. As will be demonstrated in the literature review (see Chapter 2), a number of books, scholarly articles, dissertations, theses, and periodicals have addressed what it is that a music director *does*. However, none has addressed the question of *how* an individual navigates the complex task of mastering the many component skills required for the job nor the pathways that music directors take in order to start and then maintain a career on Broadway. The lack of literature on the subject leaves too much room for speculation and assumption. Therefore, gathering information from individuals who have actually gone through the process of developing expertise as music directors will provide an essential source of information for this study. Additionally, there is a great value in gathering stories from these individuals as they can provide rich details from their lived experiences that go beyond a straightforward listing of the various component tasks that are expected of professionals in the field. Brinkman and Kvale further explain that when “one knows what to ask for, why one is asking, and how to ask, one can conduct short interviews that are rich in meaning” (p. 91). The insider point-of-view being brought by this researcher to this study will allow for conversations that get to the heart of the matter while probing for information that only they, the experts, can share.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

The Theory of Expertise (Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Romer, 1993) provides a lens for exploring how an individual develops expert ability over time. This theory proposes the need for “deliberate practice” (p. 368). This type of practice is more than mere repetition. It is, instead, the ability to self-correct, to recognize one’s own deficiencies, and to focus on those areas where improvement is needed. This process of deliberate practice can take years and is, in some ways, never ending. This theory proposes several important milestones in an individual’s journey

towards expertise. The first comes as an individual makes a deliberate, conscious choice to pursue expertise. The second is the transition to “full-time involvement” (p. 369). According to this theory, experts will continue to develop their skills to stay relevant and at the top of their chosen profession. Figure 1, below, illustrates the three stages of the framework divided by the two corresponding milestones as they might apply to the training and career of a Broadway music director. This study will focus on the latter two stages: First, the deliberate effort undertaken in order to achieve success or obtain full-time work (stage II) which follows the first milestone—a conscious decision to pursue a career as a music director. The second area of focus will be stage III, which comes following the transition to full-time work in the field. During stage III an individual strives to stay relevant by continuing to improve in order to experience longevity within the chosen vocation.

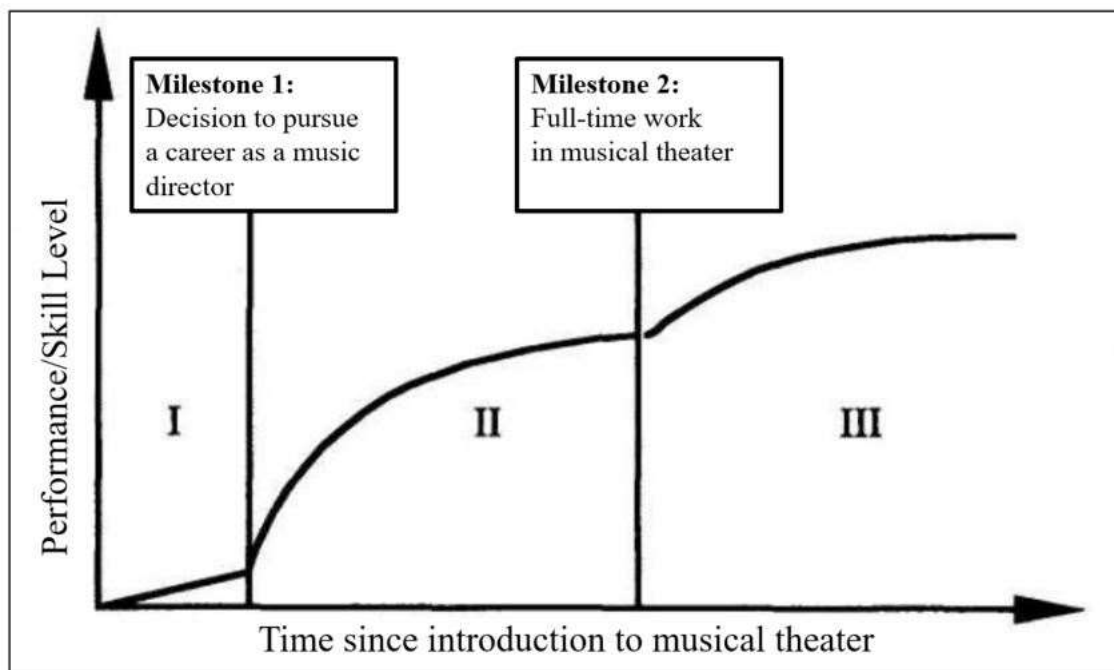


Figure 1: Theory of Expertise as applied to a music director’s developmental journey (adapted from Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Romer, 1993)

1.4 Research Questions

This study examines the career development of Broadway music directors using three primary research questions which are summarized as the Job, the Journey, and the Maintenance.

1. **(The Job) How do Broadway music directors define their job?**
 - a. What are the music-related skills and tasks?
 - b. What are the non-music skills and tasks?
 - c. How is the job different on Broadway as compared to other theatrical settings?
2. **(The Journey) What pathways do Broadway music directors take in order to (a) develop the necessary skills and (b) end up working on Broadway?**
 - a. What role does formal education play? (i.e. music lessons, college degree, etc.)
 - b. What role does autodidactic (self-taught) learning play?
 - c. What role does active participation within a “community of practice” (Wenger, 1998) play in the development of the skillset?
3. **(The Maintenance) How do music directors achieve and maintain a career on Broadway?**
 - a. What similarities emerge from the stories shared by Broadway music directors?
 - b. What differences emerge from the stories shared by Broadway music directors?
 - c. How do music directors stay relevant within their field?

A purposeful analogy, mirroring the life of a Broadway production, lives within these three questions. First, in pre-production planning meetings, the overall scope of what it is that a show will be is determined (the Job). Second, through a process of preparation/rehearsal everyone involved prepares for the opening night (the Journey). Finally, for Broadway shows in

particular, the goal is often for a long-lasting production run (the Maintenance) which requires constant care and upkeep.

The first question (the Job) aims to define the various component skills that are required for work as a music director. As will be shown in Chapter 2, a number of writers have described the job of a music director. However, those descriptions tend to focus on what a beginner or early-career music director needs to know in order to get started. Thus, this research seeks to uncover what, if anything, is different about being a music director for a professional production in New York City as compared to other theatrical settings. This first research question leaves room for the possibility that different definitions might emerge. Likewise, this question also allows for an investigation of both the music and non-music skills required for the job. Finally, given the insider point of view of this researcher, the first question aims to reduce researcher bias by allowing the participants themselves to describe what it is that they do.

The second question (the Journey) seeks to investigate the potential routes that exists for individuals who wish to develop the necessary skillset and pursue a career as a music director. This question seeks to investigate the roles, if any, played by formal education, mentoring, and/or self-teaching in the acquisition of the various component skills. This question also leaves open the possibility that the development of these skills might have occurred in ways that the researcher or the participants themselves might not have imagined. This question seeks to address (or eliminate) the assumption that music directors do not specifically train for the job in formal education settings (i.e. the narrative shared herein). Finally, given the highly collaborative nature of musical theater, this question also leaves room for an exploration of the influence played by others—the “community of practice” (Wenger, 1998)—on the development of a music director’s skill as they progress towards a career in musical theater. This second research

question is closely related to stage II within the Theory of Expertise—the deliberate effort required of an individual as they seek to develop the skills and achieve full-time work in the profession.

The third question (The Maintenance) seeks to investigate what it takes, not only to achieve work as a Broadway music director, but to understand what is necessary to sustain such a career. This question seeks for the rich details that can emerge from the stories shared and will allow for multiple perspectives to emerge. This question is closely related to stage III within the Theory of Expertise—the continued effort that is required to stay relevant and enjoy a long career.

1.5 Plan of Research

In order to investigate the three research questions, this study included two qualitative research approaches: semi-structured individual interviews and focus group discussions.

Individual Interviews

Individual in-depth interviews were conducted with 12 different individuals who met the selection criteria (that is, individuals who have been or are the music director, music supervisor or conductor for a Broadway musical in New York City). The same interview protocol was followed for each individual interview lasting approximately 60 minutes per participant. The interview protocol was developed and practiced during two different pilot studies (see Chapter 3). As needed, follow-up communications provided an opportunity for additional information to emerge along with an extra layer of validation (member checking).

Focus Group Discussion

Individuals who met the selection criteria were also invited to participate in focus group discussions. These included the same individuals who participated in the individual interviews

and one additional participant who met the selection criteria. Given the group format, a smaller number of questions were used to prompt a discussion. This allowed for conversations that elicited additional information and insights as the music directors engaged in a conversation with one another and uncovered ideas that they might not have thought of on their own. The group discussions, like the individual interviews, used a protocol developed from lessons learned in a pilot study (see Chapter 3).

Data Analysis

The data gathered from the individual interviews, the focus group discussions, and any additional information revealed during follow-up communications was coded and analyzed separately (i.e. each individual interview will be analyzed and coded on its own). The framework of the Theory of Expertise provided a lens through which the data was analyzed comparatively to see what similarities and differences emerged across the different data types. The Theory of expertise pointed this analysis towards the two milestones: (1) the deliberate decision to pursue a career as a music director and (2) the transition to full-time work along with the associated stages of deliberate practice (stage II) and continued development (stage III). A triangulation of data (Carter, et al, 2014) will be made possible through a combination of the two qualitative data types (individual interviews and focus group discussion) along with the insider point-of-view of this researcher.

1.6 Overarching Purpose

The stories and data collected revealed that there is not one single “sure” pathway that a person can follow in order to become a Broadway music director. However, the results of this study illuminate potential pathways for aspiring music directors to follow. The information gathered in this study might also prove useful in the continued development of academic

programs that focus on training music directors (a relatively new area within music and theater training programs).

1.7 Summary of Chapter 1

In this chapter the complex set of skills required of Broadway music directors was introduced—including both the music and non-music tasks. A narrative was shared as a portrait of one music director’s journey into the world of professional musical theater. The Theory of Expertise was introduced as a tool that might be useful in discussing and analyzing the narratives of professional music directors. Three research questions were introduced which will investigate how these individuals learn the job, navigate their career pathways, and seek to maintain relevance within their field. Finally, this chapter concluded with a short description of the plan to use qualitative research methods for this dissertation project.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Little has been written about the lives of Broadway music directors—especially compared with what has been written about the composers, lyricists, directors, and actors who have worked on Broadway. Academic and peer-reviewed literature, in particular, is almost silent on the subject. This lack of literature—particularly from a scholarly standpoint—is one argument supporting the need for this present study. In fact, Castro (2020), Church (2015), Fox (2015), Graham (2020), Hall (2022), Kasdorf (2020), and Laster (2001) all cite this lack of literature as an argument for their individual contributions to the topic.

Expanding the review of literature beyond the realm of academic/peer-reviewed content yields a greater amount of information. For example—as mentioned in Chapter 1—an emerging body of literature focuses on the subject of what it is that a music director does. This includes a number of books on the subject. The most in-depth resources include books written by Church (2015), Fox (2015), Hoare (1993), Laster (2001), Marshall (2016), and Morley (2011). While these books all provide excellent descriptions of the many different responsibilities of a music director, only Church provides a glimpse of the work of a music director in the professional world of Broadway shows in New York City. In fact, of these six authors of books on the subject, Church is the only writer with Broadway credits. These books (even Church's tome) are generally directed to the aspiring or amateur music director. They are written as guides to help a beginner understand what is required of a music director while providing advice for navigating the complex set of tasks required for a successful musical production.

A small number of biographies have been written about Broadway music directors and/or the experience of working in a Broadway orchestra pit. These sources, however, provide only scant details regarding the career development of these individuals and instead focus more on

their life stories and accounts of the famous people with whom they worked. Additional glimpses into the work of music directors can be found in interviews and articles that have appeared in trade magazines, newspapers and other periodicals. Finally, a few online resources such as BroadwayWorld.com and the Internet Broadway Database (IBDB) provide basic details about Broadway music directors. However, these online resources tend to include only a short bio or simply a listing of shows and/or performances that any particular music director has worked on.

Expanding the search into related topical areas yields additional information. For example, within academic literature, a number of articles and dissertations have highlighted the fact that music education programs are not preparing music teachers to take on the role of music director for school musical productions. This category of literature aims to correct that omission by providing advice and suggestions for music educators and music education programs.

The table below (Table 1) outlines the various types of literature that were explored for this dissertation study. Peer-reviewed literature is nearly silent on the subject. The greatest amount of information was found in the books and dissertations/theses identified in the review.

Table 1: Sources explored for the literature review

Source Types	
<p>Peer-reviewed literature</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Near silence 	<p>Books</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guides for Amateurs <i>(only one by a music director with Broadway experience)</i> • Biographies/Memoirs • Related topics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Theater History ○ Guides for Directors ○ Guides for Singers/Actors
<p>Dissertations/Thesis Papers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Music Education • Advice for beginners 	
<p>Newspapers/Periodicals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trade publications • Interviews • Reviews • Obituaries 	<p>Online Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IBDB (Internet Broadway Database) • Broadwayworld.com • Playbill.com • Maestra.com

The following review of this literature will demonstrate that the answer to the first research question—which asks what it is that music directors do (the Job)—is being addressed. However, a consensus definition of the job has yet to emerge. In fact, such a definition might be unattainable given the complexity of the job. The second and third questions (the pathway and the maintenance) are indirectly addressed by the literature. For example, little mention is made on the subject of how an individual might develop the requisite set of skills needed for the job beyond anecdotal suggestions. Likewise, beyond a small number of biographies, only anecdotal evidence of the potential career pathways for aspiring music directors has been published. What follows is a closer look at what the literature is saying in relation to the three research questions posed for this dissertation study.

2.1 Defining the Job: Music Responsibilities

Church (2015) provides a succinct definition of a musical director’s job by explaining that “a music director is responsible for all aspects of preparing and performing the music for a musical production” (p. 13). Nestor (2011), on the other hand, describes the three main jobs of a music director as teaching the music, maintaining the musical quality during a production’s run, and conducting live performances. Katz describes the job as working with and encouraging actors, caretaking for the composer, and working with the orchestra (see Becker, 2002). Meanwhile, Graham (2021), in a thesis paper, presents five core ideas as requisite skills needed for the job: (1) people skills, (2) musicianship, (3) research (i.e. studying the score and preparing for performance), (4) teaching & collaboration, and (5) wearing many hats. Graham further explains that the job description is “fluid” and thus “even those who are involved in theater cannot come up with a good description of what a music director does beyond teaching pitches and playing in, or conducting, the band” (p. 32).

Positioning the Music Director within the Creative Team

The creative team for a musical production is comprised of a director, a choreographer, and a music director. Church (2015) explains that this group is “thought of [as a] creative triumvirate, and ideally they work in unerring sync with one another” (p. 84-85). Marshall (2016) categorizes the three as “designers” who are “the three pillars of strength” (p. 15) for a production. Laster (2001) describes the director as the “final authority” (p. 4) for all creative decisions. Likewise, Bremner & Roll (2015) point out that in musical theater (as opposed to opera) the director is above everyone else. In any event, the relationship between the director, the choreographer, and the music director is collaborative in nature. The literature repeatedly explains the importance of a music director having a good working relationship with the director. Church (2015) states that “the director is in charge, and music directors are best off working from the assumption that a director always has good intentions” (p. 91). Nestor (2011) explains that the job of the music director is to translate the director’s intentions into musical terms for the singers and orchestra members. This idea that the music director should support the overall creative vision of the director is a theme that frequently comes up in the literature (Church, 2015; Fox, 2015; Lacamoire, 2016; Laster, 2001; Marshall, 2016; Morley, 2011; Nestor, 2011).

Within the creative team the music director holds a unique position of authority once a show goes into production—that is after rehearsals while the show is in performances. On Broadway, such production periods can extend for years. The music director is the only member of the creative team that stays with the show from auditions through rehearsals and into performances during production (Church, 2015; Graham, 2021; Heier, 1983; Laster, 2001). Graham explains that music directors are “actively involved in each performance” (p. 15) and as

such wield authority during a run in ways that the director and choreographer do not. Church (2015) describes this authority as “quality control” (p. 335) during a long run.

Master of all Music

Although the music director is below the director within the hierarchy of a production, the music director has complete control over the music department and all musical aspects of the show. Ringering (2014) explains that the music director makes sure that all members of the music department (accompanists, orchestra members, music copyists, orchestrators, etc.) know the music and stay “in sync” (p. 21) with each other. Engel describes the music director as the “high priest in matters of what is to be done musically” (p. 147). Church (2015) explains that in recent years an additional title, Music Supervisor, is being used in Broadway shows for the individual who oversees all the music in a production. In order to avoid muddying the waters, the term ‘music director’ will be used throughout this dissertation paper to describe the individual who is in charge of all musical matters for a Broadway production (more on this topic in Chapter 5). Regardless of the title used in any particular production, the music director must take on a managerial role within the production. Castro (2020), Church (2015), and Graham (2021) all provide descriptions of the music director as a manager of the people in the music department along with charge over the music itself.

This means that music directors must be excellent musicians and possess leadership qualities. On the musicianship side, Engel (1973) advocates for music directors to possess “solid musicianship, including a knowledge of harmony, form, and instrumentation and an unwavering rhythmic sense” (p. 149). Laster (2011) argues that doing the job well requires “many demands on one’s musicianship” (p. 149). Graham (2021) declares that a music director who has a solid foundation in composition and theory allows them to “advocate in explaining why the composer

likely made the choice they did, or to make a creative interpretation that is grounded in the original intent” (p. 18). Lacamoire, the music director of *Dear Evan Hansen* and *Hamilton*, describes this aspect of the job by explaining that:

Being a successful Broadway music director requires some skills that have nothing to do with actually making music. While the basic foundation of strong ‘chops,’ time, feel, and repertoire is essential, the qualities that make an MD³ great pertain to attitude, planning, and camaraderie. (p. 50)

As a manager, the music director takes responsibility for the musicians in the orchestra pit. This can include decisions regarding the hiring and firing of musicians or the designation of subs (individuals who are allowed to substitute for the regular players in performances). Church (2015) explains that the musicians in the pit “look to the music director-conductor for confident, uncomplicated leadership” (p. 264). Lacamoire (2016) further describes essential leadership skills including time management (particularly in scheduling rehearsals) and giving positive feedback that will serve the good of the show.

Conducting Performances

Perhaps the most visible part of a music director’s job is conducting performances from night to night in front of audiences. Depending on the arrangement of the theater and the orchestra pit, the conductor is often in (at least) partial view of the audience—particularly for audience members sitting in the balcony. The role of the conductor for a Broadway show varies depending on the position of the person conducting the performance. For example, Engel (1973) explains that “a conductor in the theater is one of two things: a musical director or a ‘time beater.’ This is basic” (p. 146). Church (2015) explains that the music director determines the “cues, indications, beats, phrasing” (p. 341) and so on in a show. The job of the

³ Lacamoire is using an abbreviation for music director, “MD,” that is frequently used within the musical theater industry. A conscious choice has been made not to abbreviate the title throughout this dissertation study. To read more on this topic see Church (2015, p. 7-8).

associate/assistant conductor is to “go through a similar thought process and deliver what [the music director] delivers” (p. 341).

Engel (1973) explains that one major difference between a Broadway show and an orchestral performance, is that the “theater conductor ought to be in control not only of the orchestra but of the stage as well” (p. 152). This is contrasted with Church (2015) explaining that the conductor should “coordinate or control any part of a production that is musicalized, but in truth you are no longer in control” (p. 326) because of the stage manager’s responsibilities during live performances.

A feature of many Broadway shows that affects the conducting style of a music director is the use of a click track. A click track is a pre-recorded metronome beat that is timed to line up the music with other elements of the show such as lighting cues, changes of scenery and so on. Musicians in the pit all wear headphones so that they can hear the click and stay perfectly in sync with the on-stage action. The music director does not always control the starting or stopping point of a click track within the performance, particularly if it is timed with other elements of the production. In such cases the stage manager, sound designer, or someone else might start the click track. Hawthorne (1980) explains that in such situations the role of the conductor changes to one of a “co-coordinator” (p. 48) between the live music and the pre-recorded elements. Church (2015) further explains that the frequent use of click tracks addresses a common area of conflict with the choreographers who might complain about changing tempos from night to night. Click tracks avoid this altogether by ensuring a consistency of tempo across performances.

On Broadway, another challenge for the music director is to conduct the same music day after day over extended periods of time. Take, for example, *The Phantom of the Opera*, the longest running show in Broadway history which closed in April 2023. *Phantom* was performed

nearly 14 thousand times on Broadway since it first opened in 1988 (Feldman, 2022). The challenge for musicians is to keep performances fresh and exciting for an audience. Music directors for community, school, or other amateur shows do not have the challenge of a long production run. Marshall (2016) explains that “one of the most difficult tasks for performers to master is the ability to communicate familiar material repeatedly with a sense of novelty and excitement” (p. 226). Church (2015) explains that “repeated performances are one of the professional charms” (p. 326) of working on Broadway and that “conducting is fun. Lots of fun” (p. 262). Church quotes a colleague, Michael Kelly, as having said that “after the initial rush of creation the job is ‘creative repetition’” (p. 108).

Orchestration/Arranging/Working with Composer

Broadway music directors, particularly for a new show being produced for the first time, often have the opportunity to work with the composer in shaping the music for the production. McHugh (2015) goes so far as to argue that Broadway composers would be better described as composer-collaborators because of the documented fact that music directors, orchestrators, arrangers and others are involved in the creation of the final sound for a Broadway show. Chandler (2012), Church (2015), Engel (1975), Kennedy (2020), Lacamoire (2016) and McHugh (2015) all make mention of this concept. Church explains it well when he writes, “in certain instances it is difficult to draw a line between the writers’ work and the music director’s” (p. 13). Church also explains that when a composer is actively participating in a production they become “the de facto head of the music department” (p. 81) even though they do not officially hold that position.

Additionally, music directors often compose or arrange music for the show apart from the composer. For example, Church (2015) and Engel (1975) both share examples of music directors

creating dance arrangements, overtures, or the exit music for shows. Another type of composing frequently done by music directors is the creation of vocal arrangements. For example, Michael Kosarin, Alan Menken's music director, explains that

Menken conceives his melodies in his own voice, and leaves it up to the music director and performers to translate those melodies to the voices of the characters, in terms of range, details of pitch and rhythm, style, and above all, dramatic purpose (Church, 2015, p. 169).

Musical Theater Styles

In a paper describing the demands placed on singers working in professional theater, Green, Freeman, Edwards & Meyer (2014) identified four singing styles in musical theater: traditional, contemporary, pop/rock, and legit. Music directors should be comfortable working within this range of styles common to musical theater. Engel (1973) explains that “a pianist is considered proficient if they can play Chopin Etudes, but for the musical theater the pianist needs to comprehend Jazz, swing, rock, and the traditional musical theater styles” (p. 136). Morley (2011) describes that it is important for a pianist/conductor to “not only lead the ‘time’ but also sit ‘in the groove’” (p. 41). Church (2015) explains that this concept of style also applies to the way a music director conducts a show. A conductor might use a more traditional approach to conducting for a show such as *My Fair Lady* but more of a beat/jazz style of conducting for a show like *American Idiot*, which is “largely played to click tracks” because “rock music does not really need a conductor to keep it together” (p. 157). While interviewing for his job as the music director for *The Lion King* on Broadway, Church further describes how he spent time “boning up on African music and Indonesian theater after presenting [himself]... as reasonably well versed in ethnomusicology” (p. 148). Broadway composer and music director, Tom Kitt, explained that he has both a rock background and a classical background (Backstage, 2008).

Another concept that comes up, related to musical theater style, is the importance of the rhythm section within the pit orchestra for driving the music and creating the overall feel of the music for a show. Church (2015), Fox (2015), Laster (2001), Marshall (2016), Morley (2011), and Ringering (2014) all discuss this point. Ringering (2014) explains, “the rhythm section (piano, bass, and drums) have particularly difficult jobs as they play nearly every measure and provide the harmonic core and the pulse to the show” (p. 21). Church (2015), Laster (2001) and Marshall (2016) add to this point by describing that it is important for a music director to maintain close contact with the rhythm section—the drummer in particular—while conducting a show. If the music director is also playing a keyboard while conducting, Marshall (2019) compares the music director to “a church organist, showing style and accents with her⁴ head and conducting with one hand when necessary” (p. 7).

Teaching the Music

The responsibility to teach the music to the actors during the rehearsal process is universally recognized as one of the primary duties of a music director. Graham (2021) listed this as one of the five core ideas for a music director. Mary-Mitchell Campbell, a veteran Broadway music director, explains that she “pays attention to how each [performer] learns” (Nestor, 2011). Church (2015) also describes the teaching and learning that continues after the rehearsal process and explains that during a long run of a production the music director is also responsible for training replacement performers who join the cast. This responsibility even plays a role in the decisions a music director makes during the casting process. For example, Gerle (2011), speaking of someone singing off-pitch in an audition, says that “the music director knows that a rehearsal period is too short a time to fix someone’s ear” (p. 82).

⁴ This is one of the rare instances within the literature when a female descriptor is used. This will be discussed in more detail later.

As part of their role as a teacher, the music director often functions as a vocal coach for the singers in a production. Nestor (2011), Bremner & Roll (2015) and Benson (2018) all make the argument that a music director should understand vocal production and be able to help actors make healthy singing choices for their performances.

High Standards and Professionalism

Another quality—particularly when discussing music directors who work on Broadway—is the high standard of professionalism and dedication that they bring to their work. For example, Paul Gemignani is described as demanding a certain level out of the musicians with whom he works “without [his] having to say it a thousand times” (Ahlfors, 2006). Church (2015) explains that in a professional production, the musical accompaniment during tech or dress rehearsals, whether a rehearsal pianist or the orchestra, should be perfect or near perfect. Church also describes the high level of commitment he brings to a production—especially during a long run when he states that “Broadway is supposedly the paragon of stage performance, and sets the example for all stage performance. Anything less than full involvement in the task at hand is unconscionable” (p. 336).

Hand-in-hand with high standards comes the need for a music director to recognize their own limitations. That is, a professional music director will seek to work with others who bring different strengths to the production. Church (2015) explains,

If the musicians in the orchestra are more musically skilled or experienced than you, allow them a greater voice in shaping the music, so long as their suggestions do not interfere with the whole of the production (p. 264).

Likewise, Fox (2015) suggests that a music director should be open to feedback (p. 114).

Church, in another part of his book, also explains that, “as much as you as music director might want to do the playing yourself, there is no harm—indeed, there are many advantages—in

assigning the job to someone who plays it better” (p. 139). Marshall (2016) and Rodosthenous (2018) both advocate for music directors to be kind to themselves in this regard. Perhaps Lacamoire (2016) puts it best: “everyone who is working on the show is there because of a talent they possess that you don’t. Recognize this!” (p. 50).

2.2 Defining the Job: Non-Music Responsibilities

In addition to being an expert musician, music directors need to possess other skills. For example, Lacamoire (2016) outlined five skills that have nothing to do with the music: looking at the big picture, being a master scheduler, giving positive reinforcement, collaboration, and serving the piece. Laster (2001), Church (2015) and Engel (1973) also discuss the importance of time management as an essential skill for a music director.

The Language of Theater

Another non-music skill required of a music director is the ability to use the language of theater. Laster (2001), Church (2015), Rodosthenous (2018), Kasdorf (2020) and Graham (2021) all describe the importance of this skill not only when working with the other members of the creative team but also in rehearsals with actors and the orchestra. Situations inevitably arise in which the music director needs to be able to translate the musicality of a moment in the score into terms to which actors can understand and relate. Music director David Shrubsole said that he gives musical notes by “suggesting an acting choice” (Rodosthenous, 2018, p. 390) rather than, for example, simply telling an actor that they are singing flat. Others describe this skill as being the liaison or translator between the music and the drama (Nestor, 2011; Pogrebin, 2000). Alan Menken likewise describes the music director as being “the crossroads of notes from the composer, the stage manager, the director, and the producer” (Church, 2020, p. xiii).

Complex Set of Skills/Wearing Many Hats

The job of a music director is complex and requires the wearing of many hats. Nestor (2011) explains that the musical director takes on different roles when in rehearsal as compared to when in performance. Graham (2021) cites the “fluidity in the role” (p. 28) as a music director needs to be able to quickly switch gears from being a teacher of the music to being a member of the creative team. The sheer length of the books by Church (2015), 392 pages; Marshall (2016), 258 pages; Morley (2011) with 199 pages; Fox (2015), 164 pages; Laster (2001), 150 pages; and, Hoare (1993), 94 pages, all attest to the fact that a music director has a myriad of responsibilities and assumes multiple roles over the course of a production.

Rapport/Being Personable

An important characteristic for longevity in a career as a professional music director is the ability to work well with others. Hal Prince—the legendary director/producer—describes veteran music director Paul Gemignani as “jovial but firm” (Pogrebin, 2000). Lacamoire (2016) describes this characteristic as camaraderie. Church (2015) further explains the importance of a congenial relationship with the on-stage performers from the start of the rehearsal process because that relationship continues into the run of the show. “When you cast and contract a production you look for people who will get along and will function in the workplace without conflict” (p. 342). Suskin (2009) paints a vivid picture of a music director displaying a playful side in a performance of *Sweeny Todd*. During a long, sustained chord, the music director “chokes—hand clutching his throat—and finally collapses across the podium, effectively ending the chord” (p. 287). On the flip side, however, Engel (1973) shares an experience of working with a skilled pianist who was “uncooperative, complaining, or ambitious in ways that caused them to sprout horns” (p. 143). Those negative personality traits eventually translated into less and less work for that pianist.

Advocate for the Musicians/Music

Beyond the realm of the rehearsal studio and the orchestra pit, a Broadway music director can be the advocate for the members of the orchestra. Within the literature this theme comes up in relation to the concept of ‘house minimums’ for Broadway theaters. The house minimum refers to the minimum number of musicians that must be used in a production in any particular Broadway theater. These numbers are negotiated between the musicians Union (AFM, Local 802) and the league of Broadway Producers. Over time, since the 1950s, the house minimums have been shrinking as contracts are renegotiated (Meffe, 2011; Rudetsky, 2007). The reasons include the incorporation of more and more electronics in orchestra pits (i.e. less players) along with budgetary concerns of producers. Disputes over house minimums have led to shut downs and walkouts on Broadway (Pogrebin, 2003). Beyond these larger industry-wide disputes, however, music directors are involved in discussions with the producer and director to determine the size and makeup of the orchestra for a Broadway show. Armbrust (2003) explains that producers will seemingly always ask, “is there any way we can have less?” (p. 3). Suskin (2009) puts it this way,

Broadway musicals are usually scored for anywhere from six to thirty players, depending on economics, pit size, and union requirements. Sometimes, they even take into account the needs and desires of the composer (p. 282).

Music directors must stand up for the music, and the musicians to ensure that a composer’s creative vision is realized. Church (2015), advocating for live performances with a big, Broadway sound, exclaims, “Is not a high-priced ticket worth the human-based superiority that the art form demands?” (p. 25).

2.3 Career Pathways and Career Development

An examination of what the literature is saying about the second and third research questions (the Journey and the Maintenance) does not yield as much information. In fact, this lack of literature is an argument in favor of the present study. The following section will, however, highlight the themes that begin to emerge which show that there is a relationship between the development of the skills and the career pathways. These emerging themes might represent a good starting point for addressing the answer to research questions two and three.

Being Bit by the Musical Theater Bug

One common anecdote that comes up when speaking of a career on Broadway is the idea that at some point a person is bitten by the ‘musical theater bug.’ In other words, having an enjoyable experience with musical theater makes a person want to seek out additional opportunities to participate in the art form. In his memoir, Loud (2022) describes an on-stage experience in school years in which he suddenly realized that he “belonged in this theater” (p. 53). Perhaps, even more pointedly is Loud’s description of the moment when he knew he wanted to pursue a career as a music director. He was cast in the original production of Stephen Sondheim’s *Merrily We Roll Along*, one of Broadway’s most famous flops. During that experience he watched the music director, Paul Gemignani who is described as “the one constant” within the chaos of that production. Later on, Loud came to the realization that he “wanted Gemignani’s job” and that he “belonged on the podium” (p. 111). Ahlfors (2006), Church (2015), Dramatist (2008), Morgan (2018) and Pressley (2017) share similar examples of music directors having this sort of experience. This seems to be the first step in a lifelong love of the musical theater art form. This concept lines up nicely with the first milestone, as outlined in

the Theory of Expertise, in which an individual makes the conscious decision to pursue expertise within a specific field.

Piano Skills as Entryway

A potential entry point, also seen in the literature, emerges from the descriptions of rehearsal pianists or audition pianists who gain an entryway into the career using their skills. Church (2015), Engel (1973), Fox (2015), Kasdorf (2020), Laster (2001), and Marshall (2019) all share examples of music directors who started their careers as pianists. Laster describes being a rehearsal pianist as a “stepping stone” (p. 63), while Graham (2021) argues that community theaters should seek out young pianists who might benefit from the experience of playing piano for rehearsals or auditions and thus set them on the career path of a music director. Engel (1973) describes keeping his eye out for new pianists to hire while also cautioning, “Advancement is a ‘dividend,’ not to be counted on beforehand” (p. 144). Church (2015) describes the music director as the “chief accompanist” (p. 225) for a production. Meanwhile, Morley (2011) explains that, “more and more musicals are being conducted from the keyboard, so certainly in the professional setting piano skills are becoming more and more essential for the working musical director” (p. 34).

As with just about anything in life, there are exceptions to the rule. For example, one of the most prolific music directors on Broadway, Paul Gemignani who served as the music director for most of the collaborations between Stephen Sondheim and Hal Prince, got his start as a drummer (Ahlfors, 2006; Church, 2015; and Pogrebin, 2000). Church also describes individuals for whom the ability to play accordion has led to work as music directors on Broadway (Church, 2015, p. 248). An additional example emerged in the pilot study for this dissertation project as a

music director described in her interview that she was able to find work on Broadway because of her ability to play the guitar.

It's Who You Know/Connections

Yet another theme that falls under the umbrella of the career pathways is the importance of interpersonal connections for building a career and finding work as a music director. Kennedy (2020) describes how Alex Lacamoire got his start working as an assistant music director for *Wicked* (2003) and that the connections made in that work eventually led to his work on *In the Heights* and *Hamilton*. Morley (2011) explains that, “unlike other performers (actors and instrumentalists), Musical Directors don't tend to audition for jobs,” instead they are offered jobs based on their reputation and past work. So, “this means you have to get yourself known in the industry” (p. 163). One way to do this, according to Church (2015) is to have a “musical proficiency with music of all styles, including those which are disappearing” (p. 44) as a way to build that reputation.

Learning by Doing

Church (2015) explains that, “in music direction you learn best by doing” (p. 121). This concept of hands-on, experiential learning is a theme that comes up repeatedly, at least anecdotally, in the literature. Davey (2010) and Graham (2021) both describe the process of learning the job as a series of experiences over time during which the required skills are gradually developed. This theme also emerges when looking at what the literature says about how popular music performers learn their craft. For example, Green (2002) brings up the concept of “self-teaching, that is, autodidactic learning” (p. 459) while Smith (2016) describes this as “learning experiences” (p. 36).

Although not speaking of music directors specifically, Napier (2008) in a critical review of two books that focus on training students to be musical theater performers, presents an argument that a book can never replace experience because experience is essential in learning the craft of musical theater. This same argument is applicable to music directors. Nelson and Masters (2021), describe how a music assistant hired for a university musical production was able to gain experience and insight into the “inner workings of putting the show together” (p. 93). In fact, Morley (2011) explains that for an aspiring music director “there is no substitute for experience” (p. 163).

Engel (1973) describes amateur summer stock productions as one option for gaining experience by explaining that “many a young conductor has cut his teeth at summer musical theaters, which generally exists on revivals” (p. 150). Likewise, Loud (2022) describes the experience of working in summer stock and tours prior to landing a gig as a Broadway music director. Morley (2011) provided a list of suggestions for individuals who wish to pursue a career as a music director (p. 163-164):

1. Build up your resume/CV as much as possible
2. Keep yourself open to as many styles as possible
3. Do anything and everything
4. Remember that you are only as good as your last gig
5. Learn from the people around you
6. Keep an eye out for new work opportunities
7. Keep your CV/Resume up to date

Associate/assistant conductor position as stepping stone

Beyond playing piano, another common theme is the idea of Broadway music directors working their way up by first serving as an associate or assistant conductor on a Broadway show (often while playing a keyboard 2 or keyboard 3 part). In fact, Church (2015) explains that some people prefer to simply stay in the position of associate “because the job entails less responsibility and

less stress, and sometimes a greater emphasis on the musical than the extra musical” (p. 95). Examples of associates or assistants moving up to the position of music director are shared by Church (2015), Engel (1973), Kennedy (2020), Marshall (2019), Rudetsky (2007), and Toronto Star (1999) in addition to the narrative shared in chapter 1 of this dissertation study. On Broadway, there is only one assistant conductor and all others are associates. These titles are delineated within the rules of the musician’s union, Local 802, which describe the use of these titles and the pay scale associated with each (Church, 2015, p. 95).

2.4 Other Findings in the Literature

Music Education and Teacher Preparation

One area in which an academic eye has been trained on the work of music directors emerges within the realm of music education and teacher preparation programs. This subset of the literature points out the fact that, at least within the United States of America and Canada, the annual musical is a tradition at many high schools. Marshall (2019) explains that “the musical is often the most complicated production undertaken by the music department and is a public demonstration of the school’s vocal and instrumental instruction” (p. 2). Morgan (2018) likewise points out that two thirds of the schools in a city in Canada produce either an annual or bi-annual full-length musical. A survey by Davey (2010) found that a large majority of secondary schools—80 percent—produce a musical. Likewise, Williams (2003) found that over 84 percent of the high schools in Ohio present a musical regularly. The issue, these authors point out, is that music education programs are not preparing vocal and instrumental music teachers to take on the role of music director for a musical even though this is a highly visible and important part of their work as music educators.

Thus, these academic papers are all written with the aim to give advice to high school teachers who find themselves in the position of music director for their school. For example, Bruenger (2005) provides suggestions for choral teachers who are having to consider the instrumental demands of a musical. Marshall (2019) provides a listing of resources for preservice teachers or music teacher educators who wish to include an aspect of music direction for theater in their preservice training. Snider (1995), while noting that the state of California at that time had no standards for musical theater, presents a complete curriculum outline for musical theater that could be used in high schools. Meanwhile, Morgan (2018) provides a high-level view of the school production, from a producer's point of view which includes the planning and preparation that is required to successfully put on a musical in a high school setting. Boland and Argenti, in their book, *Musicals! Directing School and Community Theater*, describe the scenario of a high school English teacher who is thrown into the position of director for the school musical. Their book, though not written specifically for the music director, is full of useful information and advice that any high school teacher could use to their benefit while planning and directing a musical in their school.

Other writers go on to describe the benefits that come to students from participating in the school musical. For example, Ringering (2014) and Rosewall (1981) describe the potential for learning that arises by giving high school instrumentalists an opportunity to play in the orchestra pit for the school show. Heier (1983) describes multiple benefits such as exposure to a larger segment of the community, participating in something that is challenging and complex, and that participation in the school musical allows students to experience another aspect of the music business. Lord (2011), using a background and training in musical theater, argues that the concepts of performance in musical theater can be used to enhance the performance of choral

music. Ryan (2014) argues that “participation in a high school musical theater production” allows students to “foster positive social and personal development through the formation of a community of practice” (p. 1). Rawson, in a heartwarming essay printed in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, argues that there is great value in the effort required to mount a high school musical. Rawson proclaims that “if you want to feel better about the world today, the perfect medicine is the high school musical in your own town or neighborhood” (see Boland and Argentini, 1997).

The “unseen” nature of the job

The work of a Broadway music director is often unseen, and sometimes goes unappreciated. This fact is mentioned repeatedly throughout the literature. As Morley (2011) explains, “there is a lot more to it than just waving your arms around in a rather bizarre way!” (p. 2). Castro (2020) in a review of Church’s book, *Music Direction for the Stage: A View from the Podium*, points out that the book is full of evidence of the “unseen (by the audience) role of the music director as contractor, employee and personnel-manager” (p. 126) and that “the music director’s work is largely invisible” (p. 125) as just one part of the larger, overall makeup of a production.

Take, for instance, the difference between how the conductor of a symphony orchestra or an opera is received by those audiences as compared to that of a Broadway music director. Engel (1973) complains that

Theater audiences, as opposed to opera audiences (many of the same people in both), have been taught no respect for theater conductors. To the audience, the show starts only when the curtain rises (p. 159).

Suskin (2009) thus describes the entrance of the music director through the dimly lit environment of an orchestra pit as they weave “among the seated musicians and the standing microphones, stepping on toes and electric cables, trying not to look foolish” (p. 283). Engel (1973), decries

how, at the end of a performance, the cast briefly gestures to the conductor while “the audience is fighting its way up the aisles” (p. 159). Thus, Pogrebin (2000, April 19) laments that “on Broadway, a conductor is often as overlooked as so much wallpaper, that nameless fellow waving a stick under the stage.” Along that same line of thought, Engel (1975) complains that “seldom is a conductor commented on by a critic-let alone listed in the show credits accompanying the review-unless it is to say that the orchestra is too loud” (p. 170).

This lack of recognition is not only limited to the audience. For example, Graham (2021) explains that “even those who are involved in theater cannot come up with a good description of what a music director does” (p. 32). Meanwhile, Church (2015) describes an experience in which he felt unappreciated by an actor who, upon departing a long running show, gave a speech individually thanking everyone involved in the production, “but not, of course, the musicians in the orchestra. Or the orchestra. Or, for that matter, the music director or sound operator” (p. 111). Add to this list the fact that a Tony Award for music direction was discontinued after 1964. Engel (1973) who was a winner of multiple Tony awards for music direction described this as the “final indignity” (p. 161). Trying to change this reality, Church (2015) describes the efforts made in vain to reinstate that category to the Tony’s when he was on the musician’s union committee in the 1990s.

As previously described, even the work a music director does in collaboration with the composer is unrecognized and unseen. Thus, McHugh (2015) describes the “wide spectrum of models in terms of authorial control” (p. 607) that exist in musical theater. Chandler (2012), brings to light the story of Alan Doggett, the music director who collaborated with Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice in the earliest version of *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, whose contributions to the development of that show have largely been forgotten.

Even books that describe the creation and development of musicals often fail to mention the work and contributions of music directors. For example, in *The Musical from the Inside Out* (Citron, 1991), the only mention of the music director comes when describing the move from development into production when an “orchestrator, musical director and several assistants, 'dance pianist,' rehearsal pianist, engineer, will be busy getting started on their work and casting will probably begin now" (p. 23). Likewise, Wollman and Sternfeld (2011) in detailing the biggest flop in Broadway history, *Spider Man: Turn Off the Dark* make no mention of the music director—at least not by name—when describing how the director, Julie Taymor, assembled her “dream team” (p. 4). Similarly, Pogrebin (1999, November 5) in describing the rehearsal process for *Marie Christine* at Lincoln Center provides only a few snapshots of the work of the music director throughout that process.

This lack of details is especially acute when examining academic literature. Take the peer reviewed journal, *Studies in Musical Theater*, published three times annually since 2007. Even this journal, with a focus on musical theater, includes only a scant mention of the work and lives of Broadway music directors. A recent search (March 2024) of the journal’s content using the term “music director” yields three articles and a search for “conductor” yields only two articles. A search for the term “music direction” results in just one article. Compare those results to the list that appears after searching for “composer” with 61 results, “director” with 43 results, “lyricist” with 31 results, and “choreographer” with 13 different articles.

Incidentally, of the four articles that come up after using search terms like “music director” or “conductor,” only one, Rodosthenous (2018) focuses on the work of a music director through an interview with British music director and composer David Shrubsole. The other articles are not about music directors but instead include Asare (2020) who reports on a group

discussion of Black musical theater artists in New York City, some of whom list music direction in their bio—but not as the topic of discussion; Castro (2020) who reviewed Church’s book, *Music Direction for the Stage: A View From the Podium*; Meffe (2011) who analyzes the shrinking size of Broadway pit orchestras but does not delve into the role of the music director; and lastly, Nelson and Masters (2021) who describe the process of bringing a rarely heard musical back to life on a university campus.

Another aspect to the “unseen” nature of the work is the fact that job openings for the position of music director are rarely made public. For example, Green, Freeman, Edwards & Meyer (2014) point out that lead roles in Broadway musicals are often cast through invitation-only auditions. This is similar to the point made by Morley (2011) that job openings for the position of music director are rarely advertised publicly.

However, not all examples of the unseen nature of the work should be viewed as negative. In fact, there are some positive aspects that emerge when considering the “unseen” nature of the job. For example, Church (2015) explains that “the audience doesn’t hear the music director; they hear the music” (p. 5). Laster (2001), tells players in the orchestra pit that “the audience paid to see the show on the stage, not the one in the pit” (p. 140). Rodosthenous (2018) describes a conversation with the sound designer of a show in which they came to the realization that both of their jobs involve a subtlety that is often unknown to the audience, and yet can “subvert scenes very easily” (p. 392). Fox, likewise sees this invisible nature of the job as a positive thing by explaining that those working in an orchestra pit have one goal: “don’t be mentioned in the review” as the orchestra is supposed to “serve the show without drawing attention to itself by being the weak point” (p. 89).

Forgotten Stories and Unheard Voices

An unexpected source, at least when it comes to reading the basic biographical information of Broadway music directors, was found in the obituary section of the New York Times. This is where, for example, the story of Liza Redfield was found—including a photograph of her holding the baton in front of the orchestra the night of her first performance as the conductor of *The Music Man*. Liza Redfield was the first woman to have a full-time job as the conductor for a Broadway show when she became the music director of that show during its original run in 1960 (Genzlinger, 2018). Yet she, like so many other women who have worked in the industry, is virtually unknown and forgotten.

Women’s voices or even the mention of women is largely absent from the literature, with a few exceptions. For example, almost every major book on the subject was written by a man. The most substantive contributions by women include the master’s thesis by Graham (2021) and the biography of Paul Gemingnani written by Hall (2022). Graham explains that in her own work as a music director she has “faced unique challenges” and has “spent a great deal of time working to find ways of dismantling the structures that keep men, particularly white men, at the top of these production team ladders” (p. 4). Later, in her paper, she describes that in the interviews she conducted for her research, “nearly every woman touched on their gender being a struggle at times” and that those who have Broadway experience “shared similar experiences that were not present in the responses of those who had exclusively worked in regional⁵, community or educational settings” (page 11).

An attempt is being made by others to amplify the voices of women who work on Broadway. For example, Nestor (2011), in an article that appeared in *Backstage* magazine,

⁵ A network of professional theaters in the United States, often referred to as the regionals, is officially known as the League of Resident Theatres or LORT, which is a collection of “75 member theaters in 29 states and the District of Columbia. LORT is the largest professional theater association of its kind in the United States” (League of Resident Theatres, 2024)

interviewed women working as music directors on Broadway in order to describe how the work of a music director helps to shape an actor's performance. Meanwhile, Marks (2009)—who writes specifically about women directors rather than music directors—points out how difficult it has been for women to take the helm of musicals because “women are still having to grope their way to the power seat in an artistic field such as theater.” Marks further explains that of the 15 musicals produced on Broadway during the 2009 Broadway season, only two were “shepherded by women.” A similar discussion could be had about the women who are serving as music directors for Broadway productions.

Thus, amplifying the voices of women is an important part of the plan going forward in this dissertation study. Support for this can be seen, for example, in research conducted by Berkers, Verboord, and Weij (2016) who examined articles focused on arts and culture that were published in major newspapers across a 50-year period (1955 to 2005) in order to determine whether the proportion of women mentioned in those articles changed over time. What they found was that the proportion remained “at around 25% throughout the whole fifty-year period.” Meanwhile, over that same period the proportion of women working in the arts increased “from about 30-35 percent to in 1975 to 45-50 percent in 2005” (p. 532). Likewise, Cox (2015) highlights the fact that during the 2015-16 Broadway season the amount of diversity on-stage was commendable. That season included productions of *Spring Awakening* with deaf actors and an actor in a wheel chair, the opening of *Hamilton* with its diverse cast, and *Fun Home* “the first musical ever written with a butch lesbian protagonist” (p. 48). However, all of this diversity was on-stage. The same is not true backstage behind-the-scenes. Finally, Gould (2011) using a feminist point of view to argue for a more feminist approach to music and music education explains that the feminist approach has always “been to make a difference: in society generally

or in this case, education and music education specifically” (p. 140). Likewise, this researcher argues that elevating the voices of women in this study will serve to correct the fact that women’s stories have been left untold—especially within the realm of music direction—and that highlighting these stories will make a difference.

A recent, and positive development, regarding the voices of women in musical theater has come with the creation of the group Maestra which supports “the women and non-binary people who make the music in the musical theater industry.” The group, founded in 2017, expanded exponentially during the global pandemic in 2020 into an “international network of over 1500 women and non-binary musicians whose presence and collective power has the potential to change the industry” (Maestra, 2022). More details about Maestra and other groups that are building pipelines for aspiring music directors is included in chapter 8.

2.5 Summary of Chapter 2

This literature review has highlighted the fact that peer-reviewed sources are almost silent on the topic of Broadway music directors. Thus, the greatest source of information on the topic comes from outside the academy. This includes books and guides written to provide advice for amateur or beginner music directors—six books on the topic were identified. Only one of those books, Church (2016), was written by a music director with Broadway experience. Other sources explored in this review include biographies, articles from newspapers and other periodicals, books on related topics (such as direction for theater), and online resources. Ultimately, this literature review reveals that the answer to the first research question, which seeks to define the work of a music director, is being addressed. But, given the complexity of the work, a consensus definition does not emerge. The answers to the second and third questions (the pathway and maintenance) are not directly addressed by the literature. This lack of information related to the

career pathways and career development of Broadway music directors is an argument in favor of this study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter will describe in detail the methodology used for this dissertation study. This will include a description of the selection criteria, the recruitment of participants, and an explanation of how the qualitative data were collected, stored, and analyzed. This is followed by a brief discussion of the lessons learned from two pilot studies undertaken in preparation for this research project. The chapter concludes with a description of the demographics of the participants who were recruited and ultimately participated in the individual interviews and focus groups discussions.

3.1 Participants and Setting

As described in Chapter 1, the selection criteria for this study were limited to individuals who have worked as a conductor and music director (or music supervisor) for a Broadway production in New York City. A Broadway show is defined as one that meets the three criteria for Tony award eligibility: (1) the show is originally produced in one of the Theater Wing or Broadway League Theaters in New York City (2) with at least 500 seats in the house and (3) that abides by an Actors' Equity "production" contract. (American Theater Wing, n.d.). There are several reasons for limiting the eligibility to individuals with Broadway credits. First, musical theater produced on Broadway is considered the "paragon of stage performance" (Church 2015, p. 336). Thus, Broadway shows serve as a model for regional, community, school and other amateur musical theater productions (Graham, 2021). Secondly, great value is placed on Broadway experience—not only in professional theater but within academic circles as well. Openings for musical theater faculty positions in higher education frequently list Broadway experience as a preferred qualification. The Manhattan School of Music, for example, proudly proclaims that their "musical theater faculty are professional artists who have created and

performed in some of Broadway's greatest shows" (<https://www.msmnyc.edu/msm-faculty/>). Finally, given the scarcity of literature addressing the second and third research questions, the best possible source of information comes from those individuals who have lived experience navigating and building careers as Broadway music directors.

Beyond the selection criteria of Broadway experience, an additional effort was made to identify individuals whose voices were not present (or were underrepresented) in the literature review. For example, given the lack of women's voices in the literature, a particular effort was made to invite women who meet the selection criteria to participate. Or, in other words, Broadway music directors who are not white and male are valuable to this study. The stories of these individuals should be heard.

Procedures

Identifying individuals who meet the selection criteria required the use of "purposeful sampling rather than the random sampling commonly used in standardized interviewing" (Conway, 2020, p. 50). This was accomplished through a combination of both convenience sampling (contacting professional music directors who are already within this researcher's professional network) along with snowball sampling (asking for additional suggestions from that network in order to seek out potential participants). A "wish list" of potential participants was generated over the course of this research. That list included names suggested by the participants of the pilot studies, classmates, and other professional contacts who were made aware of this study. Additional resources used to identify potential participants included the Maestra Directory (<https://maestramusic.org/directory/>), and the alumni resources available to this researcher through the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University and the BMI Lehman Engel Musical Theater Writing Workshop.

Individuals who agreed to participate were invited to take part in an individual interview and were also invited to join a focused group discussion. Participants of both the individual interviews and the focus group discussions were given the opportunity to provide additional comments and clarifications through follow-up communications as a part of the member checking process. Given that focus group data are different from individual interview data, the same individuals who participated in the interviews were invited to join the focus group. However, additional individuals—who met the same selection criteria—were also invited to join in the focus group discussions. The individual interviews and the focus group discussions were conducted online using video conferencing software (Zoom). The interviews and focus group discussions were recorded and transcribed.

The focus group discussions proved to be a logistically complex component of the data collection in this study. Given the disparate schedules of the participants and the limited scope of the selection criteria, every effort was made to find a mutually agreed upon time. The use of online video conferencing software allowed for greater flexibility in finding a date and time for each focus group to convene. The difficulty in scheduling these discussions was worth the effort because the focus group elicited comments from the participants that “they might not have made individually” (Carter, et. al, 2014, p. 545). The focus group discussions were limited to a few topics as that allowed for a deeper discussion of the subject matter while at the same time giving all participants the chance to join in the conversation. Like the individual interviews, the words spoken during the focus group discussion were recorded and transcribed.

3.2 Pilot Studies

Two separate pilot studies were conducted in anticipation of this larger dissertation project. The first pilot study, using individual interviews, was conducted as a part of an Interview

Data and Analysis course. The second pilot study, consisting of both individual interviews and a focus group discussion, was undertaken as part of a Qualitative Research Methods course.

First Pilot Study

For the initial pilot study, two individuals with Broadway experience as music directors participated in individual interviews, which were transcribed, coded and analyzed separately and comparatively. An unexpected decision to use real names, rather than anonymizing the data, was made during the course of the initial pilot study. When asked, the participants both quickly and happily agreed to allow for the use of their real names. This was done for several reasons. First, the subject matter of the interview discussions did not reveal topics that are sensitive in nature (such as harassment or abuse). Second, anonymizing the names of the participants would not be enough to protect their identities. Given the small world nature of the Broadway community and the high-profile nature of their work, the names of other individuals such as directors, choreographers, composers and other collaborators would need to be anonymized as well. Even the titles of shows they have worked on would need to be changed. Inquiring readers could easily access online resources, such as the Internet Broadway Database (IBDB) to look up the title of a show and easily see the name of every member of the creative team who worked on the production and any subsequent revival. The difficulty of anonymizing data was underscored during the literature review. Kramer (2006), took great care to anonymize as much information as they possibly could, including the title of the show. However, someone with an in-depth knowledge of the musical theater canon would be able to easily identify the name of the show that was observed in rehearsals and performances simply through a close examination of the descriptions that were provided in the report. Thus, one could argue that so much information would need to be altered or withheld in order to maintain anonymity that the end result would

feel completely detached from musical theater as it is presented on Broadway. Further support for the use of real names is found Graham's (2021) thesis paper in which real names were used when discussing the interviews that had been conducted for that research project. This argument for the use of real names is augmented by the fact that the work and careers of Broadway music directors, as demonstrated in the literature review, has been largely ignored in academic and peer-reviewed writing. The individuals who will participate in this dissertation study have achieved great success in their field. Shouldn't that success be celebrated and recognized?

Thus, in the recruitment materials for this dissertation study, the participants were asked to give permission for the use of their real names in the presentation of findings. They were given the option to request that their names be kept anonymous. In the end, however, this was not necessary as all participants readily agreed to the use of their real names.

Second Pilot Study

The second pilot study, conducted as a project for a Qualitative Research Methods course, included an updated interview protocol for individual interviews along with an additional data collection instrument: a focus group discussion. For the second pilot study, concern over exhausting the list of potential participants for the dissertation study led to the decision to interview individuals who have worked as professional music directors for national tours, but not on Broadway. However, this decision led to an unanticipated group dynamic within that discussion. The third participant, the non-Broadway music director, regularly qualified their responses by saying things such as, "well I didn't do this on Broadway" before continuing with a response to the topic being discussed. Berg and Lune (2012) explain that "the heart of the data is in the group dynamic." (p. 166). Limiting the participants to individuals with Broadway

experience will hopefully foster a more consistent group dynamic for the focus group discussion planned for this dissertation study.

Lessons Learned

In the initial pilot study, it was surprising how little the two music directors spoke about the most visible part of the job: conducting a show eight times a week. In fact, when discussing the skills required for the job, they spent little time describing the individual tasks and instead devoted their time to telling stories. In retrospect, this makes sense given the fact that they earn their living by presenting stories to audiences every night.

Another surprise from the first pilot study was how both participants described themselves as not taking a “typical path” to become a Broadway music director. This begs the question then, what is the typical path? The literature review hints at a possible pathway being that of a pianist who plays for auditions or rehearsals who is then eventually hired as an associate and then ultimately becomes a music director. Is this true? To explore this question, the focus group discussions included a prompt asking the participants to describe the typical path, if there is one.

Finally, in the first pilot study, a pleasant surprise came through in an unspoken manner. Both music directors demonstrated a dedication and professional work ethic through the stories that they told. Both shared examples of long nights working to get things just right or being vigilant in listening to the music within performances in order to find ways to improve the sound or add more to a show. They did not use the words “professional” or “work ethic,” but they clearly maintain high standards and are determined to present their best possible work in any project that they undertake.

For the second pilot study, the biggest difference in design was the inclusion of a focus group in addition to individual interviews. The experience of leading a focus group allowed for a trial run of how such a discussion might be conducted. The protocol for the pilot focus group yielded more data related to the first research question (the job) than the second and third research questions (the pathway and the maintenance). Thus, the focus group protocol was altered for the dissertation study to point the conversation more towards research questions two and three.

Adjustments to the individual interview protocol for the second pilot study did allow for a deeper discussion of how the participants learned to do their job. For example, one of the participants discussed training for a master's degree in orchestral conducting while the other participant talked about studying conducting through private lessons and seeking the advice of friends who were studying conducting at the university level. These stories provided evidence that the adjustments to the interview protocol allowed for a greater focus on the second and third research questions. Another adjustment made to the interview protocol involved the use of a variety of question types. For example, the participants were asked to complete a sentence: "outside of the orchestra pit, the music director is responsible for..." Another question asked them to make a Likert-type scale assessment of the relationship between the music director and the director. These questions proved useful by allowing for a greater variety of information and led the conversation in directions that were not possible in the first pilot study.

3.3 Protocols and Research Questions

The individual interviews and the focus group discussions followed protocols developed during the pilot studies. The questions were designed to mine for information and answers related to the three research questions. They were also constructed in a way to allow for an

analysis using the Theory of Expertise with its milestones and stages as a framework for discussing and analyzing the data that was gathered. Tables 1, 2, and 3, below, illustrate how the interview protocol questions and the focus group prompts are related to research questions 1, 2, and 3, respectively. Each table also includes a listing of the type of question that was used along with how each question relates to a milestone or stage found within the Theory of Expertise.

Table 2: Protocols Related to Research Question One (The Job)

Interview Protocol Question	Type of Question	Location within Framework/Design
Imagine you have to write a posting that will be listed on playbill.com or backstage.com advertising an opening for the music director of an upcoming Broadway show. What would you write as the job description of a Broadway music director?	Broad Brush	The Job (big picture)
Now, imagine you are the producer for that same upcoming Broadway musical. What attributes or qualities would you look for in the person you hire to be the music director?	Hypothetical	The Job (big picture)
On a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 being “not necessary at all” and 7 being “absolutely necessary”, how would you rank the importance of piano or keyboard skills for a Broadway music director? Please explain your choice.	Rating	Stage II/Stage III
Please complete the following sentence, “outside of the orchestra pit, the music director is responsible for _____”	Sentence Completion	Stage II/Stage III
Focus Group Prompt		Location within Framework/Design
How is working as the MD for a Broadway show different than being the MD in other theatrical contexts?	Broad Brush	Stage II/Stage III

Table 3: Protocols Related to Research Question Two (The Journey)

Interview Protocol Question	Type of Question	Location within Framework/Design
Some people describe falling in love with musical theater as being “bitten” by the musical theater bug. Do you remember being bitten by the “bug”? Please tell me that story.	Critical Incident	Moving into Stage II
In his book on music direction for the stage, Joe Church, claims that “in music direction you learn best by doing.” Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?	Reaction Statement	Stage II
Keeping in mind the time between your decision to pursue work on Broadway and when you actually achieved that goal... would you tell me about a challenge you faced during that time and what you did to overcome that challenge?	Critical Incident	Stage II
Did you have a mentor or someone who helped you learn the ropes? If so, please tell me about that person and how they helped you.	Heroes or Villains	Stage II
You mentioned that your first gig on Broadway, as a music director, was with [SHOW NAME]. Would you tell me the story of how you got that job?	Critical Incident	Transition to Stage III
Focus Group Prompt	Type of Question	Location within Framework/Design
Is there a traditional pathway to becoming a Broadway music director? If so, what does that look like?	Broad Brush	Stage II & Moving into Stage III

Table 4: Protocols Related to Research Question Three (The Maintenance)

Interview Protocol Question	Type of Question	Location within Framework/Design
If the show you are working on closes (or your contract comes to an end), what do you do to find your next gig?	Critical Incident	Stage III
Are there gigs you choose not to do, jobs you choose not to take? Tell me about that.	Self-Assessment	Stage III
What do you, in your work as a Broadway MD, need help with? On the other end of the spectrum, what do you, in your work as a Broadway MD, feel is your greatest strength or asset?	Self-Assessment	Stage III
In order to keep working as a Broadway MD, which do you think is more important: the people you know/connections you have made or, your skills as a musician? Please explain.	Reaction	Stage III
Focus Group Prompt	Type of Question	Location within Framework/Design
What characteristics does a person need to possess in order to have a long career as a music director on Broadway?	Broad Brush	Stage III

3.4 Instrumentation Plan

An important consideration in the development of the instrumentation plan for this dissertation study was an attempt to avoid confirmation bias. That is, to avoid finding information that confirms what is previously thought or believed about a particular subject. One potential area of bias is the insider point-of-view of this researcher—someone with professional music directing experience on national tours. The first research question was specifically designed to help eliminate this bias by allowing the participants themselves to describe and define their work. Meanwhile, the structure of the data collection plan, with two different qualitative research methods (individual interviews and a focus group) allowed for a triangulation of the themes and findings during the analysis phase of the study. Additionally, the Theory of Expertise provided a lens to focus the discussion and analysis of the emerging themes. The framework of the Theory of Expertise points the discussion towards the major milestones and stages that occur as music directors make a conscious decision to pursue a career in musical theater, work towards the goal of a career on Broadway, transition to full-time work, and do what it takes to stay relevant within the field in order to maintain longevity within their chosen career. The research questions and their relationship to the theoretical framework led to interviews and focus group discussions that explored and highlighted the individual stories of the participants while also paving the way for the comparative analysis that follows (see chapters 5 through 7).

3.5 Recruitment and Data Collection

Over the course of the 2023 fall semester a series of twelve individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with individuals who have worked as a conductor, music director, and/or music supervisor for at least one Broadway production in New York City. A combination of convenience sampling and snowball sampling was used in order to identify twelve individuals

who agreed to participate in the study. Additionally, two separate focused group discussions were convened following the individual interviews. The focus groups included individuals who had participated in the individual interviews along with another participant who met the selection criteria but who had not participated in an individual interview.

The Recruitment Process

Beginning in August, 2023, a series of email messages were distributed to nearly every one of the primary researcher's professional theater contacts requesting help in identifying individuals who met the selection criteria for inclusion. The professional contacts included the directors of the BMI Lehman Engel Musical Theatre Writing Workshop, faculty members of the Graduate Musical Theatre Writing Program at New York University, actors and musicians who had worked with the primary researcher on Broadway national tours, and friends or acquaintances who work on Broadway (in any capacity) or who have professional theater connections. This initial round of emails yielded a list of individuals who were then contacted using the IRB (Institutional Review Board) approved recruitment text. Whenever a potential participant responded in the affirmative, a follow-up message was sent in order to schedule an interview. During interviews, participants were asked if they could suggest additional individuals who might meet the selection criteria. This led to additional connections and invitations to participate in the study. These interviews were conducted between August and November of 2023. The Focus group discussions took place in November and December of 2023.

One struggle during the recruitment process was navigating the busy schedules of the potential participants. In fact, several individuals who initially responded in the affirmative to participating in the study were not included because of issues with availability. In the end, however, a diverse group of 12 individuals participated in the individual interviews and eight

individuals participated in the focus group discussions. The 12 individuals who were interviewed include four White men, three White women, two Black men, two Asian men and one Latinx male. The number of years of experience these individuals have working on Broadway (in any capacity) ranges from 7 years to more than 40 years.

Focus Group Participants

For the focus group discussions, a deliberate effort was made to elevate the voices of women and individuals from diverse backgrounds. This dynamic, which did not go unnoticed by the participants, naturally led to a discussion of diversity and inclusion in the world of Broadway music directors (more on this topic in Chapter 6, “Barriers to Entry” and Chapter 8 “Building a Pipeline”). The first focus group (n=5) convened in late November of 2023. Of the five participants in the first focus group discussion, four had participated in the individual semi-structured interviews and one had not. The second focus group (n=3) met in December 2023 and included one White woman, one White man, and one Black man, all of whom had participated in the individual interviews. Overall, between the two focus groups, a total of 8 individuals participated with an even split of four women and four men. The breakdown by gender and race can be seen in Figures 2 and 3 below.

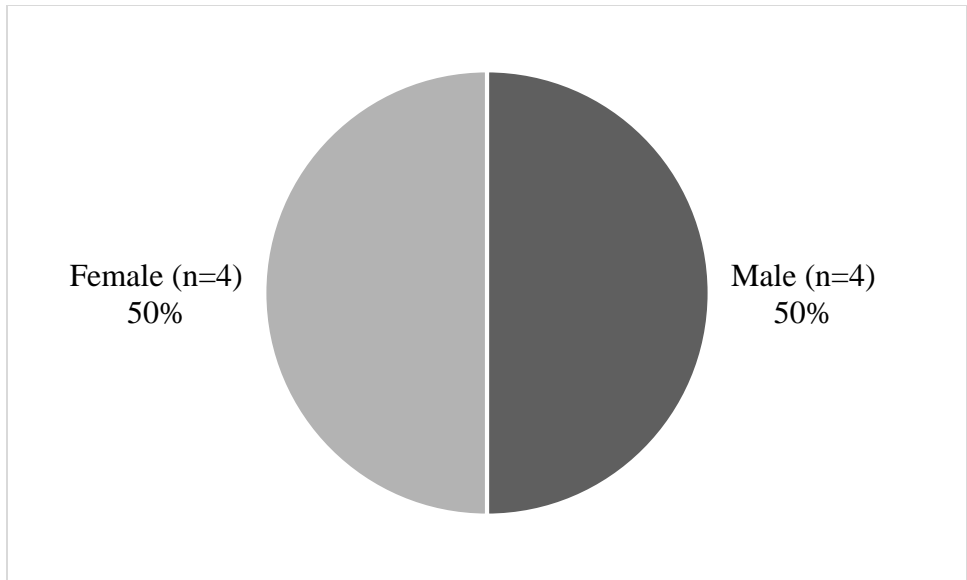


Figure 2: Focus Groups Participants by Gender

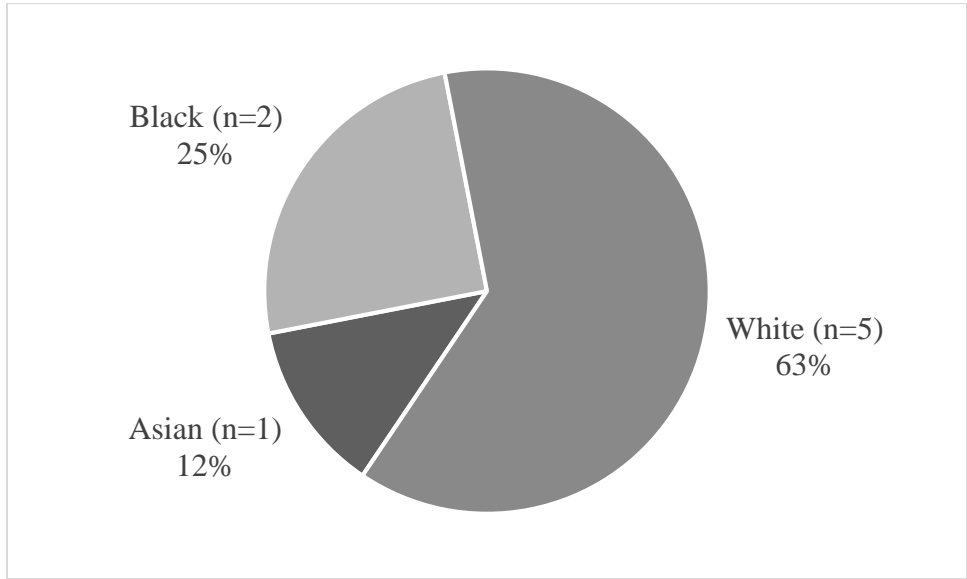


Figure 3: Focus Group Participants by Racial Background

3.6 Data Analysis

As each individual interview was completed, a transcript of that interview was generated and proofread. Proofreading was first done by manually making corrections to an automatically generated transcript (downloaded from the Zoom software solution). The researcher then listened

again to a recording of the entire conversation with the transcript in hand to mark any additional changes that need to be made. Once this proofreading phase was completed, the researcher followed up with several participants, using email communications, to ask for additional information or clarifications. The email communications were saved in the same manner as the interviews and transcripts, using a password protected file on the Teachers College Google Drive.

Physical copies of notes or other collected information were stored in a private office with a locked door or on the Teachers College Google Drive. As mentioned previously, the informed consent forms asked participants for permission to use their real names. In the recruitment phase every participant in the individual interviews and focus group discussions agreed to the use of their real name in this study.

Each individual interview was first coded independently. The individual transcripts and codes were analyzed using Dedoose, a software application that allows for codes to be tagged, grouped, and organized. This process allowed for individual codes to be compared across all interviews, and similarly coded transcript quotations could be easily compared by theme. These themes were then organized into sections which were ultimately grouped according to the three research questions. The format for the following chapters, based on the three research questions, and will proceed as follows:

- Chapter 4: A brief introduction is given for each of the 12 individuals who participated in the semi-structured individual interviews. These are written as brief portraits and include an overview of each individual's Broadway experience.
- Chapter 5: Using the interview and focus group data sets, an exploration of emerging answers to the first research question ("The Job") are discussed and analyzed.

- Chapter 6: Using the interview and focus group data sets, an exploration of emerging answers to the second research question (“The Journey”) are discussed and analyzed.
- Chapter 7: Using the interview and focus group data sets, an exploration of emerging answers to the third research question (“The Maintenance”) are discussed and analyzed.
- Chapter 8: A summary of the emerging themes found in this research are presented; A discussion of the implications this research might have for teaching and learning is laid out; A discussion of how the participants in this study are working to build pipelines for the next generation of music directors is explained; and finally, a discussion of additional methods and topics illuminated by the presented study are given as suggestions for future research.

3.8 Summary of Chapter 3

In this chapter, a detailed explanation of the selection criteria for participants, along with an argument in support of that selection criteria, was outlined. This was followed by a discussion of lessons learned in the pilot studies, including: adjustments to the interview protocols/focus group discussion prompts, and a decision to request permission for the use of participant’s real names. The interview protocols were presented along with their relationship to the three research questions and the theoretical framework. Finally, a description of the recruitment process, the management of data, the analysis process, and a roadmap of the following chapters was presented.

Chapter 4: The Participants

Nothing can kill a show like too much exposition (from Urinetown by Greg Kotis)

This chapter provides a brief portrait for each of the 12 individuals who participated in the semi-structured interviews—organized by the number of Broadway credits listed in the Playbill.com database from least to most. Each portrait is presented with a particular focus on what led to each participant’s decision to pursue a career in music and/or musical theater—these stories represent the first milestone of the Theory of Expertise. Other biographical details for each participant include a listing of their first Broadway gig, their first Broadway show as music director or conductor, and their current (or most recent) Broadway work. Each portrait ends with a quote in which the participant describes their “greatest strength.”

Table 5: Overview of the Participants

Name	Demographics	College Major	Playbill.com ⁶ ROLES	Playbill.com SHOWS
Steven Cuevas*	Male – Asian	Musical Theater Performance	0	0
Justin Mendoza	Male – Latino	Film Studies/Musical Theater	3	1
Cynthia Kortman Westphal	Female – White	Music	7	3
Haley Bennett	Female – White	Psychology	9	3
Ted Arthur	Male – Asian	Journalism/Music	10	4
John Bell	Male – White	Musical Theater Performance	10	5
Andrea Grody	Female – White	Music (minor in Theater)	11	3
Joseph Church**	Male – White	Music	15	7
Carmel Dean***	Female – White	Music	16	6
Alvin Hough Jr.	Male – Black	Meteorology	18	9
Zane Mark	Male – Black	None	20	12
Ted Sperling	Male – White	Music	36	15
David Chase	Male – White	Biology	59	39

*Steven has conducted Broadway shows, but has not yet held the title of music director for a Broadway production.

** Joseph is the author of *Music Direction for the Stage: A View from the Podium*, cited in the literature review.

***Carmel was a focus group participant only.

⁶ Playbill.com is home to the “largest Broadway database online.” The numbers in this table represent the number of “roles” and the number of “shows” for which each participant is listed in that database. A “role” represents a job title. Some participants held multiple titles on the same show (i.e. music supervisor, music director, arranger, orchestrator, etc.). Each “show” is a distinct Broadway production for which they are credited.

4.1 Participant: Steven Cuevas

Steven Cuevas knew what he wanted to do with his life the day he went on a field trip with his 5th grade class to see *Beauty and the Beast* on Broadway at the Palace Theater. “I mean, I could recite who I saw in the cast that day” he explains, “that was a pivotal moment in my life. I sat, front mezzanine at the Palace Theater. It was magical.” He continued, “That was the one time I was like, okay, this is what I want to do.”

Steven started piano lessons when he was three years old. He “went through the routine of learning certain pieces” from the repertoire books but he also sought out additional music. “I would ask my parents to get me sheet music for this song that I liked, or music from a movie that I really liked, or a musical that I just listened to.” He ultimately felt that the “classical stuff was for lessons only.” Even his piano teacher began giving him “popular music or non-classical music to learn.” Thus, Steven started developing a diverse taste for music. This desire to learn many different styles of music has served him well in his career.

A lot of musicals these days are sort of based in either contemporary pop music or music of a certain era. And... when people ask me what my favorite type of music is, I just say good music. Because I'm not very picky... so I just listen to so many things.

After high school, Steven wasn't sure what to do. He knew that he loved music, but he didn't want to pursue classical music. “Classical was never part of my journey. I would never do that.” He ultimately ended up studying musical theater performance for his undergraduate degree. Having that acting experience has helped Steven in his work as a music director. He understands where actors are coming from and thus provides leadership that can bring out the best in them.

It should be noted that although Steven has not actually served as the music director for a Broadway show in New York City, he is on the path towards becoming one. He has, for

example, been the music director for multiple national tours and has subbed as a conductor for multiple Broadway shows. Based on what will be shown throughout the remainder of this dissertation, Steven is clearly heading in the right direction.

Table 6: A Glimpse of Steven’s Broadway Work

First Broadway Gig:	Keyboards, <i>Kinky Boots</i> (2016)
First Broadway Show as Conductor:	<i>Once on This Island</i> (2017) (as sub. Conductor)
Current/Most Recent Broadway Work:	Subbing, & <i>Juliet and Moulin Rouge</i>
Dream Show as Music Director:	<i>Beauty and the Beast</i>

When asked, “what is your greatest strength as a music director,” Steven responded:

After a first week of a process, after all the music is taught, an actor will come up to me and say something like, ‘Oh, you're great to work with. You're just so nice and easy, and you make it understandable.’ And then I start thinking, who are these monsters you've been working with all your career? Because I'm just doing what I think should be done! It's not like I'm doing anything differently. Because, I know how *not* to run a room. And I also have heard that from other collaborators and composers and directors saying that I'm a good communicator about the music to people who don't necessarily understand the music. And so I like to relate to people and sort of come to their level of understanding, because I think that's when we will both understand each other. And then that's when the collaboration can begin.

4.2 Participant: Justin Mendoza

Justin remembers that as a young child his parents “always had music playing in the house” even though they weren’t musicians by trade. One particular album Justin loved listening to was Barbara Streisand’s *The Broadway Album*. That album introduced him to famous musical theater songs from classic shows—even though at the time he just thought, “that was her music.” He was also introduced to theater music at his K-8 school where each year the eighth graders put on a play. “I didn’t really clock what it was, but I knew that when I got to the eighth grade, I got to do that.” As he progressed through the grades, he looked forward to being in the play. During his eighth-grade year the show was *Anything Goes*. Justin was cast as Moon Face Martin and he “had a blast” doing it.

Around that same time, Justin's parents thought he would enjoy seeing a professional production—given that he was in the school play. So, when the national tour of *Les Misérables* came through San Francisco they took him to see it.

It was a Sunday matinee of *Le Mis* and that rocked my world. I couldn't believe it! I remember, during intermission, when they finished the song 'One Day More' my parents were like, what do you think? I couldn't even speak because I couldn't believe that I felt something from watching people sing on stage and tell this story on stage.

During his high school years, Justin's love of musical theater continued to grow. He was a part of The Young People's Teen Musical Theater Company, a non-profit organization affiliated with the San Francisco Parks and Recreation department. He felt the passion of the director, Diane, who introduced the company to a "vast array of musical theater" including songs from *Follies* and *La Cage Au Faux* and "stuff that was probably inappropriate to teach kids." But Justin loved it. He would go to the library and check out CDs of Broadway cast recordings so that he could listen at home and he "loved it all."

Justin has been the music director for *The Book of Mormon* on Broadway since 2016. He has conducted that show more than 2,000 times. When asked how he can continue working on the same show, and performing the same material night after night, he explained, "it's all a mentality. First of all, I love the show. I love what I'm doing, and the story and the message it delivers." He also mentioned how he feels that he is working with "the best human beings" who are all on the same page because "we care about the material and each other." He concluded the thought by describing a long-running show as "almost like a tenured professor gig, where the curriculum is the same, but the students are different and I think it's important to stay present."

Table 7: A Glimpse of Justin’s Broadway Work

First Broadway Gig:	Keyboards, <i>In the Heights</i> (2009)
First Broadway Gig as Music Director:	<i>Book of Mormon</i> (since 2016)
Current/Most Recent Broadway Work:	<i>Book of Mormon</i> (since 2016)
Dream Show as Music Director:	<i>Fiddler on the Roof</i> and <i>Les Misérables</i>

When asked, “what is your greatest strength as a music director,” Justin responded:

I would like to think—because I was primarily an actor and vocalist from age 13 to 22—I understand the complexities [laughs] and I think I can speak to the actors in a way where I don't talk down to them. I think I can understand actors and singers on their level. In a way, what they do is very hard. And this instrument is so, so vulnerable. They say actors are crazy... Actors are crazy! Well, sure, you know, so are musicians. We're all crazy! But I think to have a music director who understands the complexities of the voice, and how it relates to our psyche and our mental health, I think is important. I think I'm good at that. I'd like to think I'm good at that.

4.3 Participant: Cynthia Kortman Westphal

Cynthia’s undergraduate degree was in classical piano performance with a minor in opera. She had no real interest in Broadway musicals. “I pretty actively turned my nose up at musical theater for a pretty good long time.” So, when she moved to New York City, it was with the dream of pursuing a career as an opera coach. At the time she only knew one person in New York City, “an ex-boyfriend who was a jazz bass player.” He was supposed to pick her up at the airport, but he forgot! Not wanting to sit around all day, she stowed her bags and took a bus into the city to Times Square. “It was literally the only name on a bus that I had heard of.” Once there, she still couldn't get a hold of her friend, so she decided to get off the street for a while by seeing a Broadway show.

The show was *Crazy for You*, with music by George Gershwin. One of her undergraduate piano recitals had featured “a whole set of Gershwin popular song transcriptions.” Not only did this mean she was fairly familiar with the music in *Crazy for You* (and thus enjoyed the performance), but her mind was opened up to new possibilities that night:

I was up in the balcony, so I could look down into the orchestra, and there was a woman conducting. And I had never in my life seen a woman conduct before... I had no idea that women conducted and I had no idea that musical theater had [dramatic pause] good music.

This discovery moment led to a career spanning more than a decade working on Broadway as a pianist and music director. “Ever since then my life has been driven by musical theater. I still loooooove classical music. I love opera. I could easily go in that direction too, had the opportunity presented itself.” But, that first night in the city she “really got hooked on the idea of being a conductor.” In recent years, Cynthia is no longer working as a music director in New York City. Instead, she is helping prepare the next generation of music directors and Broadway performers as a Professor of Musical Theater at the University of Michigan.

Table 8: A Glimpse of Cynthia’s Broadway Work

First Broadway Gig:	Keyboards, <i>Miss Saigon</i> (circa 1996)
First Broadway Gig as Music Director:	<i>The Gershwins' Fascinating Rhythm</i> (1999)
Current/Most Recent Broadway Work:	<i>A Christmas Story</i> (2012)
Dream Show as Music Director:	<i>Come From Away</i>

When asked, “what is your greatest strength as a music director,” Cynthia responded:

“I would say it's a combination of... I'm a good manager of people and personalities and that I do a really good job of helping everyone do their best work. And I'm also—I would say this now versus when I was first starting out. I've now done years and years—decades—of vocal pedagogy training. So, I think now I'm also really good at crafting, like I said, a vocal design, both with soloists and with ensembles, and making vocals sound really special and really unique to the storytelling. And I think I'm strong at the storytelling, at integrating the music into the overall arc of the storytelling of the show.

4.4 Participant: Haley Bennett

When she was ten years old, Haley auditioned for, and was cast in a role in the Maine State Music Theater production of *Ragtime*. “I had no idea what I was doing or in for, but I was super excited.” The production company had hired professional adult actors from New York City, but the children in the show were all locals. As a result, Haley was able to observe the

professionals throughout that process. “Being surrounded by all of these actors who were doing this professionally, I just sort of fell in love with the whole environment and everything we were doing.”

Pursuing a career as a music director, however, wasn’t something Haley considered seriously until after finishing her undergraduate degree in psychology. One experience that pushed her towards a career in theater happened the summer after her sophomore year of college. She had applied for an internship in choreography, another element of musical theater that she loves. During the interview for that internship, she learned that the choreographer was not hiring an intern after all but that the music supervisor was. The interviewer noticed that Haley had music experience on her resume and asked if she would consider doing the music internship instead. Haley, of course, said yes. That led to her first Broadway experience, working as a music intern on *Porgy and Bess*. That experience working with the music team allowed her to “be in that part of the room and realize, oh my god, I love doing this.” She was able to come to the realization that there “are actual career paths that you can have.” Prior to that experience she mistakenly thought that acting was “the only way into theater and either you’re acting or you’re not really involved.” The experience with *Porgy and Bess*, however, opened her eyes to the possibility of working in theater as a member of the music team.

Even so, as she was nearing graduation from college, she planned to start a master’s program in arts and education. Shortly before that graduate program was to begin, she was given the chance to work on some high-profile productions in New York City (thanks to a mentor, David Chase—another participant in this dissertation project). “He sat me down and was like, if you want to move to New York, I think that you should.” He was able to help her find enough freelance work in the city to be the equivalent commitment as a fall semester. “If I’m being

realistic and honest with myself, of course I would love to move to New York and do this. And I'm never going to have an opportunity again as a freelancer to do that with two very large-scale projects lined up." So, she did not start graduate school and instead moved to New York City, which Haley claims was the "best decision ever."

Table 9: A Glimpse at Haley's Broadway Work

First Broadway Gig:	Music Intern, <i>Porgy and Bess</i> (2012)
First Broadway Gig as Music Director:	<i>& Juliet</i> (2023)
Current/Most Recent Broadway Work:	<i>& Juliet</i> (2023)
Dream Show as Music Director:	"An original production of something brand new."

When asked, "what is your greatest strength as a music director," Haley responded:

I think that I am skilled at working with singers. Both in terms of creating an environment where people feel safe and comfortable and supported to try things and learn and grow and ultimately bring their best work to the table. I think, especially working with an ensemble, I particularly enjoy working with complex ensemble vocal arrangements and shaping those and bringing those to life. So that's sort of one of my favorite elements of the job. And then, in a sort of like separate category, I am a very organized person, and I think that that is a key component, just in terms of maintaining and navigating schedules. Rehearsal schedules, show schedules, sub schedules, all of these things. And in a new [show] process, keeping track of the state of music as it goes to the orchestrator or to the copyist and all of those elements. So, I think that that's definitely another important piece of the puzzle that I feel pretty competent at.

4.5 Participant: Ted Arthur

Ted Arthur's journey to Broadway was not a direct path. In college he double majored in Broadcast Journalism and Piano Performance. After college, he planned to pursue his dream of working in television reporting. He graduated "in December of 2008 and that's when the market or the economy was really bad. And there were no television jobs." After looking for several months he ended up applying for and getting a job as an assistant director at Purdue Musical Organizations at Purdue University. He thought he would work there, temporarily, while continuing his search for television jobs. He admits that he hadn't really considered music as a career, because—even with his classical piano training— "That was not on the radar for me."

It turns out that he loved the music job at Purdue. But after a few years there he did not see the potential for growth. This led him to seek out opportunities elsewhere. For example, he tried to break into film music. He moved to Los Angeles and was hired as an assistant for a composer. But, he ended up abandoning that work because it was primarily “emails and coordination” and “there was no actual music writing.” He admitted, “it was a pretty low point in my career of what I wanted to do.” He knew he needed to leave Los Angeles.

I remember watching a behind the scenes of when they did *The Sound of Music* live on NBC. And I remember seeing everybody being in a rehearsal room collaborating and working on the show. And I realized—I can pinpoint it to that moment—I realized that I wanted to go to New York and try this. This is what I wanted to do. I was not playing [the piano], and for me playing is my creative outlet. And so I remember seeing that thinking, that's what I wanna do. And so I picked up and moved to New York. Didn't know anybody in New York... and that was in 2014.

Table 10: A Glimpse of Ted Arthur’s Broadway Work

First Broadway Gig:	Keyboards, <i>Wicked</i> (circa 2016)
First Broadway Gig as Music Director:	<i>Diana, the Musical</i> (2020)
Current/Most Recent Broadway Work:	<i>Back to the Future</i> (2023)
Dream Show as Music Director:	<i>Hairspray</i>

When asked, “what is your greatest strength as a music director,” Ted Arthur responded:

I think my greatest strength is—sounds so ridiculous—I think I'm a great player. I'm a good player. And I think that is what I bring to the table. Because I think that's what gets me hired to a lot of these jobs. But I think, honestly... equally my greatest trait is that I work well with other people. I feel like I'm very diplomatic. I think I can read the room well... and I'm collaborative and welcoming.

4.6 Participant: John Bell

He doesn't really remember the specifics, but John has heard his mother tell stories that when he listened to music as a child, he would wave his arms around and imagine he was the conductor. He explains that “maybe it was something I always wanted to do.” Although he can't point to a single moment that helped him make the decision to pursue a career in musical theater, he described being around the arts and theater throughout his childhood years. “My parents were

not big theater people, but they just are into the arts and everything. So we just always went to shows” and doing so was “important.” Additionally, as a child, John was a professional singer and also took piano lessons and dance lessons and “whatever there was to do, I did. So it’s just sort of been a part of my life for as long as I can remember.”

During his college years, John studied musical theater performance even though he “never aspired to be an actor and... didn’t go to a single audition ever.” He did, however, have the idea of being a conductor. “I sort of had this idea that you had to be old to be a conductor, so I think I just thought well, maybe I’ll be an actor for a while and then when I’m—whatever I thought old was at the time—then I would transition to being a music director.” After college, he moved to New York City and soon realized, “there are people who embark on this path as young adults... So I just did that.”

Table 11: A Glimpse of John’s Broadway Work

First Broadway Gig:	Keyboards/Associate Conductor, <i>On the Town</i> (2014)
First Broadway Gig as Music Director:	<i>Spamalot</i> (2023)
Current/Most Recent Broadway Work:	<i>Spamalot</i> (2023)
Dream Show as Music Director:	<i>Carousel</i> and <i>Sound of Music</i>

When asked, “what is your greatest strength as a music director,” John responded:

Gosh. I try not to analyze myself in those ways, but I would probably say, communication skills. ...I don't know what I necessarily do, other than... I have taken leadership and management classes, which I actually find to be really valuable. But, I don't know what you particularly do to get better at it other than practice, you know?

4.7 Participant: Andrea Grody

Andrea fell in love with musical theater when she was nine years old. “I remember really loving *Phantom of the Opera*. That’s not my first Broadway show, it’s my second, but it’s the one that I really loved.” In fact, Andrea explains, “I was already into music and storytelling at that time. And that’s been true my entire life.” However, she didn’t seriously consider pursuing a

career as a music director until her sophomore year of college. She explored pursuing a career as a film composer. But, after spending a summer in Los Angeles, she “discovered that work is very solitary” and wasn’t the right fit for her. She even considered pursuing a career in science. Looking back, she thinks it was inevitable that she would have a career in musical theater. “I was acting, but then also I was the assistant music director on a show when I was 14 at my summer camp.” In high school she tried her hand at arranging, composing, and conducting. For example, she conducted the school choir singing an original composition. Even in college she offered to be music director for student productions. “But I didn’t decide to pursue it professionally until sophomore year.” One pivotal moment in making that decision happened in 2007 as Andrea was watching Tony Awards on television. She saw Kimberly Grigsby conducting a performance of “Momma Who Bore Me” from *Spring Awakening*. “Kim conducted on stage... and she’s such an amazing conductor. And I was like, I want to be that person.” Andrea believes that seeing Kimberly Grigsby conduct was an important moment, not only in her own career, but also in terms of “how important those moments are for so many of us” especially when considering the visibility of women in the industry. [See also Chapter 6, “Barriers to Entry” and Chapter 8, “Building a Pipeline”].

Table 12: A Glimpse of Andrea’s Broadway Work

First Broadway Gig:	Music Director, <i>The Band’s Visit</i> (2017)
First Broadway Show as Music Director	Music Director, <i>The Band’s Visit</i> (2017)
Current/Most Recent Broadway Work:	<i>Suffs</i> (2024)
Dream Show as Music Director:	“My dream show doesn't exist yet. It's a new thing that I am a part of from inception.”

When asked, “what is your greatest strength as a music director,” Andrea responded:

The first one is my joy—which I thought, at the beginning of my career, was not an asset. I thought that it made me seem immature. And I mean I've matured as a human. But people say this a lot, I bring a lot of energy to the room. I'm a very enthusiastic person. I'm very

passionate about what I do. And at that base level I just accomplish a lot by just being that person. And I have a lot of—it's weird to say these things—but I'm a very warm and empathetic person. And I'm very intense and very demanding. But it's always from a place of, of course, we want to be better. This is awesome. Let's... we can do our best! And it always comes from there. And just that base assumption of how I see the world and what we do is just a natural part of me, and that's, I think, a really strong one.

[Secondly,] I'm very organized, and I'm very clear. And I can always keep working at those things. But I know that even as I'm holding myself to a very high standard. I'm much more organized and much more clear than a lot of people. And I think that's a technical strength I have developed. That's also how my brain works, but I think the first one is probably the right answer.

4.8 Participant: Joseph “Joe” Church

When asked about his introduction to Broadway, Joe explained that he first loved plays, not musicals. In fact, Joe described himself as “a kid in the seventies... growing up with rock and roll,” and so the music in Broadway shows was not interesting to him, he thought it was “un-groovy.” During his high school years, he loved rock music. “Every rock and pop band that was out there, I was a scientist of it. I was an historian of it. I was so into it.” That desire to study and understand music was enhanced by Joseph’s childhood piano teacher who “taught counterpoint and harmony” to him as an eight-year-old. “Boy oh boy! Going into later music theory with that sort of language already inside me... that was so important.”

Joseph went on to earn an undergraduate degree in music. One formative experience during his college years was when he had the opportunity to conduct a production of *West Side Story*. He described it as “not just doing a musical... that’s doing a real piece of music.” That experience helped him realize that “musical theater could be a *real* piece of music *plus* the theater” (emphasis added) he already loved thanks to his appreciation for plays. “When you put it all together it was really great.” So, rather than search out, specifically, for a career as a music director, Joseph feels that his “love of music” combined with “the professional opportunities in musical theater” are what led to his Broadway career.

When he was asked whether he has any Broadway dream shows, past or present, that he would like to work on Joseph said, “one of the reasons I don’t MD as much now, as I used to, was because I had two dream shows.” He was the music director for the original production of *The Who’s Tommy* which he described as “a rock and roll kid’s dream come true” and also Disney’s *Lion King* “which was this huge, giant, collaborative extravaganza with people from all over the world.” So, he explained, “you do a *Lion King*... it’s kind of hard to find anything after that” in terms of a dream show.

Table 13: A Glimpse of Joe’s Broadway Work

First Broadway Gig:	Keyboards for <i>Starlight Express</i> (1986)
First Broadway Gig as Music Director:	<i>The Who’s Tommy</i> (1993)
Current/Most Recent Broadway Work:	<i>Amazing Grace</i> (2015)
Dream Show as Music Director:	“I don’t MD as much now as I used to... because I had two dream shows.”

When asked, “what is your greatest strength as a music director,” Joe responded:

It's probably my versatility. My eclectic spirit. Nothing is really going to phase me musically. You can throw pretty much anything at me, and I'll—if I don't know it already—I'll figure it out. And I'll do a lot of research and go practice it really hard... I had to learn about Latin music, for *In the Heights*. That was a... talk about throwing someone in the fire... I practiced that score for four months before I even dared to try it out. So yeah, I think versatility. A willingness to try anything and just my love for all kinds of music. I just love all kinds of music.

4.9 Participant: Alvin Hough Jr.

After school on Halloween his kindergarten year, Alvin was sent to the after-school room because his mother was going to be late in picking him up. The teacher there observed five-year-old Alvin at the piano. She said he “wasn’t banging on the keys like all the other kids seem to be,” instead, he was “trying to figure something out.” That teacher recommended to Alvin’s mother that she consider piano lessons—which she did. Thus began Alvin’s lifelong love of playing the piano. “I liked it. It was cool. I practiced. I was never forced to do it.” Even as an

adult, his first love is the piano. “I just love the relationship between player and piano... it’s unparalleled.”

Around the time he was 13 years old, Alvin’s piano teacher said, “I can see you’re getting good... If you ever want to do this for a living—if you ever want to make money—you will not make money if all you can play is Chopin.” She introduced him to the musicians at his church in Washington DC and there he began learning to play in other styles. Alvin explains, “I could read the notes on a page. Got that. But... following a choir director, putting a tag on the end of a song, sight transposition... all those things. I had no idea how to do that stuff.” Yet, as he was developing those new skills, he was surrounded by love and support because of the comfortable environment of his church community.

That same year, his piano teacher introduced Alvin to the world of musical theater. She knew of a summer camp in need of an assistant music director. Alvin was given the job—as a 13-year-old—to play for the camp’s production of *The Who’s Tommy*. Alvin continued working and playing shows for that same camp for the next seven years. Of those years Alvin declared, “it showed me that theater can be anything you want it to be from a genre standpoint. And that kept me interested.”

Alvin also learned some valuable lessons that he still keeps in mind to this day. For example, in that first show Alvin received help from the guitar player who took the time to sit down and help Alvin get better at playing the song “Pinball Wizard.” Alvin believes that the guitarist did this in order to make sure the overall production would be better served by their new, young, assistant music director. Alvin has taken that lesson to heart in his own career. “This business, and what we do, and the people who are involved in it—I think we all realize that if we don’t do our parts, if we don’t assist the people around us, the show is gonna suck, is gonna fail.”

Now, working as a Broadway professional, Alvin continues to seek out ways to help others succeed. He is actively involved in MUSE (Musicians United for Social Equity) and BMEP (Broadway Musicians Equity Partnership). “Are there people out there who are good enough to be Broadway music directors, but just don’t know it?” If so, “how do we find them and say, hey, you’re good at this. Let’s just mold you into being great and put you out there in the world.” (See also, “Building a Pipeline” in chapter 8.)

Table 14: A Glimpse of Alvin’s Broadway Work

First Broadway Gig:	Keyboards, Associate Conductor, <i>Scandalous</i> (2012)
First Broadway Gig as Music Director:	<i>Once on This Island</i> (2017)
Current/Most Broadway Show:	Assoc. Music Supervisor, <i>Merrily We Roll Along</i> (2023)
Dream Show as Music Director:	<i>Ragtime</i>

When asked, “what is your greatest strength as a music director,” Alvin responded:

“A lot of people see me as a really level headed person during emergencies... I guess since I'm on cameras in so many places, I look like the captain. And if the captain is like, ‘Oh my god! This is going crazy!’ And just starts throwing things—I get that no one else feels comfortable, and then everyone else starts freaking out. But if I could just figure something out, even if it's the wrong thing. But it's like, ‘hey, we're all going to go to the wrong measure together.’ I think that calms people down. And in this weird way, it's like, yes, we're entertaining. And we want it to be perfect. And we're each our own worst critic, I get that. But at the end of the day, it's theater. It's entertainment. We're human beings. We're going to make this mistake. It is not, God forbid, war! We're not in Israel right now. We're doing theater. We're trying to make people get distracted for three hours. And it's like, let's just try to be as good as we can. And then when things go wrong, they go wrong. It's not TV or film... You can't just say, ‘no! Cut! Let's do it again! Take 12!’ We don't have that luxury. It's like, well, this is what it is. And tonight, we missed that cue. So be it, go to the next one. Just rebound and get on with it.”

4.10 Participant: Zane Mark

Zane was first exposed to the world of musical theater because his father was a Broadway musician whose “very first show... was the original production of *Hair*” in 1969. His father would bring Zane and his two brothers “to the theater to do the show.” They sat with the band on

the stage during the show. “That’s how crazy it was. So, I’m like, this is Broadway. I’m in junior high school, I’m like, I want in!” The next show he saw was *Fiddler on the Roof*. That show was “completely different” and Zane realized, “something’s different with these two. But I think I like the whole idea of everybody getting together.”

When he was in high school, Zane’s father was playing for the show *Bubbling Brown Sugar*. Zane would often visit his father at the theater. There he met some of his earliest mentors and, “these guys, they’d say, hey kid come here. What? Play these eight bars over and over—dance rehearsals, you know?” They would then walk away and leave Zane to it. But it wasn’t just the camaraderie with the orchestra that drew him in. “If I really, really, really, really have to be honest. I’m in high school. And you’ve asked me to be in a room with ten to fifteen scantily clad women in dance clothes. I’m winning! I’ll pay you 50 bucks, you know, just to sit here.”

Not only that,

They would let me play the bows [exit music]. So, I’d come on, meet my father... play the bows. No one’s paying any attention to me, and its big brass... so you can’t hear the piano. But you can’t pay for that. The sitting-in-the-middle of a big band. Eight, ten, maybe twelve horns blowing full tilt. You’re not going to get that in school.

After high school, Zane had the idea that he wanted to be the youngest black music director on Broadway. He soon learned, however, that Harold Wheeler already had that distinction. So, instead of pursuing musical theater, for a number of years he “kinda left Broadway and... went out to do a lot of R&B stuff as people’s musical director.” In the mid-nineties he was approached by a friend, Daryl Waters, who asked if he’d be interested in helping out with a gig at the Public Theater. They ended up co-sharing the work as music directors. The show was, *Bring in ‘da Noise, Bring in ‘da Funk*. “I haven’t looked back since and I haven’t had another straight job or... I’ve been in Broadway since then.”

Table 15: A Glimpse of Zane’s Broadway Work

First Broadway Gig:	Music Copyist, <i>Bubbling Brown Sugar</i> (1976)
First Broadway Gig as Music Director:	<i>Bring in 'da Noise, Bring in 'da Funk</i> (1996)
Current/Most Recent Broadway Work:	<i>Holler If Ya Hear Me</i> (2014)
Dream Show as Music Director:	<i>Bring in 'da Noise, Bring in 'da Funk</i> (1996)

When asked, “what is your greatest strength as a music director,” Zane responded:

Well, definitely now, as a dance music arranger. I know how to groove. And there's something you don't teach in school! That's years of playing fusion bands, R&B gigs, playing at churches. I just know stuff that you have to just live to experience. And I also think I'm kind of like a jack of all trades and master of none. I know a little bit about everything. And so, I can dabble and put my toe over there and fake it until I get somebody else to make it. You know what I'm saying? And so, I guess the answer, the straight answer would be, I know what I can't do. And I'm not going to fake and say... that's not me. And that's why I turn down certain gigs. But I know what I can do. I know what I think I do well. And I know what I can't do.

4.11 Participant: Ted Sperling

In contrast to many of the other individuals interviewed for this dissertation project, Ted explained: “I would say I have or had a mild version of the bug as a child. I’m not one of those people who was taken to a show and instantly knew, this is for me.” But he remembers that his family owned the cast recordings for a number of classic Broadway shows, and he “listened to them many times” during those years. “I think I had an interest and an awareness of musical theater from a very young age.”

It was during his college years, however, that Ted began to feel pulled towards a career in musical theater. Robert Kimball, a professor at Yale University, offered two courses that helped spark Ted’s interest: one focused on Irving Berlin and the other on Cole Porter. During that same semester, Ted explains, “I was asked to conduct the school’s official production of *Kiss Me, Kate*. So there was a nice synergy there.” The following semester, he and a classmate, Victoria Clark (who has an illustrious Broadway career in her own right), formed the creative team for

productions of *Once Upon a Mattress* and *Side By Side* by *Sondheim*. “Those three shows in one year, sort of lit a fire under me to learn more about musical theater and do more of it.”

However, after finishing his bachelor’s degree in music at Yale, he wasn’t sure if he wanted to fully commit to a career in theater or as conductor in the classical realm. “So, I apprenticed myself to two different conductors simultaneously for that first year out of school, and I did both.” It was during that year he was hired as a rehearsal pianist for *Sunday in the Park with George*. As Ted explains it:

The scales were not evenly balanced because I was working on the most interesting Broadway show, you know, that ever happened, basically. Whereas my symphony work, although it was good, I wasn’t conducting the New York Phil, or even assistant conducting. It wasn’t apples and apples.

Ultimately, Ted made the decision to fully pursue work in musical theater because it is “a living, constantly changing, renewing art form.”

Table 16: A Glimpse of Ted Sperling’s Broadway Work

First Broadway Gig:	Keyboards, <i>On Your Toes</i> (1983)
First Broadway Gig as Music Director:	<i>My Favorite Year</i> (1992)
Current/Most Recent Broadway Work:	<i>My Fair Lady</i> (2018)
Dream Show as Music Director:	<i>Sweeny Todd</i> and <i>Gypsy</i>

When asked, “what is your greatest strength as a music director,” Ted S. responded:

Ultimately, I’m a good collaborator. I listen well. I think hard. I think I’m insightful. I have a good sense of what the audience is feeling moment to moment. I have a pretty broad musical background that I can bring to the table. I feel very confident in my musical skills, particularly my piano playing and conducting. I’m also a fairly good singer, and I understand singing. So, I feel it can be helpful to the actors, both in directing them to interpret a song, but also sometimes to inspire them to sing in a particular way. And then... I have over two decades of directing experience. So, I do bring that to the table—and that can be a plus or a minus. Sometimes directors don’t really want to hear that from a music director, which I totally get. But others are very happy to have that help. And I can coach a song very, very specifically. Sometimes in a way that a director might not, because he or she doesn’t have the musical specificity that I have. And then I also try to do that in a way that leaves a lot of room for a director to come in and shape it as well. But I hope that I’ve laid the groundwork.

4.12 Participant: David Chase

David Chase is interested in “the process of shaping and putting” shows together. “I love puzzles. So, to me, it’s all part and parcel with the same mindset. It’s like, here are the pieces, let’s fit them together and in the right way to make the right picture.” His first exposure to that process came in high school. His mother had encouraged him to join the school theater group after hearing another boy praising the school’s drama teacher. David approached that teacher and asked if he might be able to play piano for the school’s play that year (they were doing *Pippin*). The drama teacher told him that they already had a pianist. Not to be deterred, David asked, “Okay. What if I get someone to lend us an organ or keyboard and I’ll just make up my own part?” She agreed to his plan. David then convinced a local music store to lend a drawbar organ in exchange for publicity in the program. Using that organ David began going to rehearsals and made up his own part. Looking back, David is grateful for how the drama teacher handled the situation. “Instead of saying, what do you mean make up your own part? She did what every good teacher should do, which is, look at a kid who doesn’t know what they don’t know and say, great! Have an experience. Learn something.” After that, and for the rest of his high school experience, David was involved with the school drama group doing everything from performing on stage, to transcribing music, and even designing posters for the shows. Those experiences helped David “fall in love with all the fun challenges” involved in putting together a show.

For much of the past decade, David hasn’t done much work as a music director, but he regularly works as a dance arranger and vocal arranger for Broadway shows. For example, David worked on arrangements for the Broadway production of Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *Cinderella* in 2013 in which they faced the challenge of keeping the music true to the period while at the same time making it feel as fresh to a modern audience as it would have to an audience in 1957.

He asked, “if you're taking a composer's work and they're not around—how do I honor them, but maybe make it communicate a little better to an audience now?” The answer, he explains, “might mean changing some of the harmonies slightly. It might mean using the song slightly differently or giving it a different point of view or a different context.” David’s determination to work out such challenges has made him a highly sought after arranger and resource for Broadway productions.

Table 17: A Glimpse at David’s Broadway

First Broadway Gig:	Keyboards, <i>Guys and Dolls</i> (1992)
First Broadway Gig Music Director	<i>Damn Yankees</i> (1994)
Current/Recent Broadway Work:	Dance Arrangements, <i>Back to the Future</i> (2023)
Dream Show as Music Director:	“The best show I ever worked on is the show I'm working on.”

When asked, “what is your greatest strength as a music director,” David responded:

I think—and these are related—I have a great deal of passion for good storytelling and just making things happen. And I think I have a deep understanding of energy, by which I mean, how you shape something. How you move it. How you connect things. How you get from point A to point B in the most, either exciting, or deep, or effective way possible. Effective and efficient, you know? It's something I think that I always knew... which is that I [understand] something implicitly about how music functions.

4.13 Summary of Chapter 4

In this chapter a brief portrait of each of the 12 individuals who participated in the semi-structured interviews was presented along with general information about their careers on Broadway. These portraits serve as a glimpse into the first milestone associated with the Theory of Expertise in which an individual makes a deliberate decision to pursue excellence within their chosen field.

Chapter 5: Research Question 1—The Job

Nice work if you can get it, And you can get it if you try!
(from *Nice Work if You Can Get it* by George and Ira Gershwin)

As was discussed in the literature review (see chapter 2), multiple descriptions of the job of a music director have been written. However, most of the descriptions were written by individuals who do not have actual Broadway experience—the exception being the book, *Music Direction for the Stage* written by Joe Church, one of the participants of this dissertation study. An important aim, therefore, in examining the data collected for this dissertation project is a focus on what, if anything, is different about the job of a music director working on Broadway as compared to other contexts such as national tours, regional productions, Community Theater, etc. Not to mention the fact that the job of a music director job may differ depending on the individual inhabiting the role. An examination of the data collected for this present study illuminates a number of themes that provide an insight into those differences.

5.1 The Music Department/Music Team

Given the larger budgets associated with Broadway productions, the specific tasks required of individuals on the music team are often divided. This division of labor within the music department is not as common in productions outside of Broadway. Carmel explained:

I'm always amazed—and pleased—to be reminded that in a way, being an MD on Broadway is—I don't wanna say easier—but we obviously have more resources. I think our jobs on Broadway are more delineated. We often, almost always—if not always—are able to hire copyists, orchestrators, synth programmers, music assistants, that kind of thing. Other theatrical realms, as the music director, you're often doing all of that stuff yourself. So, you actually, I assume, grew up doing that and learned a lot of our chops in those other settings. So, something I'm always so grateful for, and aware of, is that we are able to really bring in the other experts. You know we have access to the best keyboard programmers and the best copyists. And so that's one difference that I am very aware of there.

In describing the makeup of her team for the upcoming production of *Suffs* on Broadway, Andrea said,

I have an associate music director. I have a rehearsal pianist who will also be a sub for both the associate music director and myself when we get to Broadway when we get to performances... And then I have two music assistants, one who is in the room with us during reversals every day, and one who's mostly working off hours, and then some shifts during the day.

Discussing this concept, Joe put it this way, “in modern times [the job] has really changed more significantly, especially on Broadway... to that sort of stratified system. Not so much in small shows, because they can't afford lots of people. You know, they can't afford a five-person music team.”

For many Broadway productions that stratification includes a delineation between the music director and the music supervisor. Joe explained, that in a production where the term music supervisor is used for the person in charge of the music team, there can also be a music director working below them. He explained, in that situation:

You probably won't perform that much—which is kind of on all the shows I'm working on now, that's what I'm doing. This stuff, in development. I'm the head of the music team. But there's someone else who's the music director. So, you know, it's not quite the same thing. Right?”

In other words, Joe explained that sometimes the title music director can be more entry level. “You are just in the orchestra pit. And you probably taught the music to the cast. But you didn't go too in depth. The music supervisor did more of the coaching and the teaching.” Zane Mark qualified his description of the music director by saying, “I'm gonna say, musical director, without a musical supervisor in the room. So that everything kinda sits on their shoulders and just making sure everything and everybody is in sync.”

In other productions the term music supervisor and music director might apply to the same person. This varies from show to show and production to production. For example, Andrea's current position with *Suffs* lists her as both the music supervisor and the music director. David provided a description of how these different titles have taken on different meanings over the years:

The current description [of music director] is somebody who can conduct the orchestra. The actual description is somebody with a musical point, who is directing the music—meaning giving the music a directorial point of view, which is what the definition of music director was up through, I would say, into the mid-nineties at which point the term Music Supervisor started taking over as the term given to the people that gave the show the point of view, from the musical standpoint. However, that is now shifting, so that music supervisor is currently becoming the person who does the managerial work which used to be done by what was called the contractor and the contractors now call themselves coordinators. So that's an extremely complicated answer.

The confusion/complication in terms of the various titles for the person in charge of the music is a major contributing factor to the decision, in this dissertation project, so simply stick to one title: music director.

Whatever the title that is used, the music department for a Broadway show includes a number of people with different specializations. Figure 16 provides an illustration for a hypothetical scenario: a Broadway show in which there is both a Music Supervisor and a Music Director. Given that there is no industry standard for the makeup or composition of a music team it is also important to note that one person could hold multiple titles within the same production. The table below illustrates how the makeup of the music team might change between the pre-production stage and the production stage of a show.

Table 18: A Hypothetical Music Team for a Broadway Production

Pre-Production	Production
Composer (if actively participating)	Music Supervisor (if actively involved)
Music Supervisor	Music Director/Keyboard 1
Music Director	Associate Music Director/Keyboard 2
Associate Music Director	Assistant Conductor/Keyboard 3
Music Assistant	Audition Pianist
Rehearsal Pianist	Rehearsal Pianist
Orchestrator	Orchestra Contractor/Coordinator
Dance/Vocal Arranger(s)	Orchestra Members and Subs
Programmers (click tracks, keyboards, etc.)	
Orchestra Contractor/Coordinator	

The collaborative relationship within the music team is important. Alvin explained that as a music director you are being pulled in so many different directions and called into production meetings and other things. “So, having a good strong team around you really helps.” Joe added, “Your music team is your circle.”

The music director will most likely be involved in hiring the members of the music team. Several participants talked about this aspect of the job—building their team. Andrea, speaking again of the upcoming *Suffs*, stated,

I have hired for the show—with the composer and orchestrator—I’ve hired a music contractor who helps hire the orchestra... I’m now hiring the orchestra. I’ve hired a copyist and a keyboard programmer in collaboration with other people. But also I’m leading that process.

Cynthia explained that the music team falls under the purview of the music director. “You’re gonna be managing, possibly a vocal arranger, an orchestrator, a dance music arranger, a music contractor.”

The information shared by the participants regarding the makeup of the music team is supported by the findings of the literature review. For example, Ringering (2014) who described the music director working to keep all members of the music team “in synch” (p.21). Likewise,

Castro (2020), Church (2015), and Graham (2021) all mentioned the hierarchy of the music department or music team with the music director being the manager.

One final idea that comes up when examining the collaboration that happens within the music department, is the clear pleasure that the participants describe from working with other professionals who are at the top of their game. Zane declared, “I just wanna play with my friends. I wanna play good music. I just wanna enjoy. And, hopefully the audience gets to go home different. Experience something.” Joe, in a similar line of reasoning explained,

I love working with musicians. They’re so much fun. And, good news, there's nothing like making good music with good musicians, I mean, I'm sorry. There’s just nothing like it in the world... nothing like it to get your heart pounding.

5.2 The Open-Ended Run

A feature of Broadway productions that came up frequently in the interviews, is the long run, or the open-ended run. There are, occasionally, limited-engagement productions on Broadway. For example, the producers of *Days of Wine and Roses* announced a limited 16 week run for the 2024 Broadway season (Paulson, 2023). The general business model for Broadway, however, is the desire for a long running production that generates profit for the producers and investors. The reality, of course, is that most Broadway shows fail to recuperate their investment (Bresiger, 2015). Several concepts related to the open-ended run came up in the conversations with the participants of this study.

Love It or Tolerate It

Among the participants, there emerges two general schools of thought related to the long run: either you love it or you tolerate it. Take for example how Justin, who has conducted *The Book of Mormon* over 2,000 times, described loving the routine of the same show night after night:

I think the [finger quotes] ‘next best thing’ is always pretty common in this industry, you know? You gotta move on to the next best show. And I am, maybe, unusual in the fact that I like doing the same thing every day. Do I sometimes find myself tired at the end of the week? Or, maybe my mind drifting off once in a while? Sure. Again I’m human.

Zane likewise explained how he enjoys repeated performances. “And then you can do it eight times a week... Dude, you’re winning man! That’s too big! And you get paid!”

Other participants, however, felt differently. David explained that the longest he conducted a show was about 18 months because he is “less interested in the eight times a week execution of theater” and is instead “more interested in the process of shaping and putting it together.” Joe reasoned,

A lot of people don't want to work on shows for a long time. That's one of the things they don't like about musical theater is the long run. It takes a certain mentality to sit in a pit for a long time, as I discovered. I did it for my kid.

Not the Same from Night to Night

Beyond the basic like (or dislike) of the long run, there is the fact that you are performing the same material from night to night. Interestingly, multiple participants talked about the fact that even though the material is the same, the actual performances and the actual work changes from day to day. Contributing factors include the ever-changing roster of musicians in the orchestra pit, actors leaving the company, understudies or swings who occasionally perform, or any other number of possible circumstances that change. Alvin said,

What happens is a show starts with these people lined up as the original Broadway original cast. And then things happen. This person got plucked to do a TV show. So this person moved up. This person swung it over... and things move around.

Justin adds to that, “oftentimes, in a long-running show you have cast members, sometimes band, but cast members who rotate... and so there's a revolving door of different people coming in.”

Those changes affect the way the show feels from night to night. These ever-changing circumstances, according to Justin, require a music director to be mentally present. He explained,

The magic of live theater is anything can happen. And it's different every single night. So, it might be technically the same on paper. But it's actually pretty different every night... there's always something new, something going on.

Zane described how he enjoys the challenge of working with new faces.

You come down [into the orchestra pit] and there's five different subs in. And the band's only 10 people...and one of [the subs] is the drummer. We're gonna have a show tonight! You know? I live for that. I live for that.

John explained the need to be vigilant from night to night because, “when you’re conducting a show something might happen. Something might go wrong. The set might not move... but you just have to keep it together.” David, in describing that type of vigilance, hopes that the music director is “micro-adjusting every single moment because of the way that an audience is reacting, either through laughter, through boredom, through whatever... you are constantly shifting that.”

Perhaps, the best summation of this idea comes from Haley:

There are always so many moving pieces that it never quite feels like, ‘oh, great, I'm just gonna go to the theater and do the show every day’... I think the expectation is that it would get more straightforward. In my experience, rarely does it actually get that much more straightforward.

Orchestra Pit Culture

Another interesting theme, related to the open-ended run, comes from talking about the music director’s responsibility—as boss of the orchestra—to set the tone in the orchestra pit.

Andrea described this as the “culture” of the orchestra. She explained that the music director needs to:

Work out that stuff and figure out rituals and traditions and basic structure to the day and the life that make it nice. Other companies have this. I did not have this experience until I had a Broadway show and I learned about Broadway culture. And I also learned that as the head of the orchestra, I'm the boss of a department and I really need to do the work to make sure that that's a positive environment for people. Because the buck stops with me.

A few specific examples of how music directors might go about setting the tone in the orchestra pit were brought up by others. Zane for example, described working on a show where

the orchestra members needed to play a kazoo. Realizing that nobody would want to share or use someone else's kazoo, he kept a large supply ready at hand so that, "any time a sub came in... would be a big ceremony. Here's your kazoo and go forth." Ted Sperling, in a focus group discussion, described the importance of a sense of humor because the members of the orchestra sit in the dark, playing their parts, and they can't see the show. "They need stimulation and something to keep it fresh. A sense of humor can do all of that."

Ted Arthur recognizes that the culture of the orchestra pit starts with the person on the podium. "It's all about the energy. If you're up there, and exuding a real negative energy, it really does affect everyone in the pit." One thing he does to avoid creating negative energy is to remember that everyone makes mistakes. "You make a mistake, and then get a dirty look from it... that does nothing in the moment to help you... I am never gonna do that on the podium." Evidence of Haley's ability to foster a positive culture in the orchestra pit comes from a story she shared of a recent interaction with a substitute player who had made an obvious mistake during a performance. After the show that player approached her. "They felt worse about having made the mistake because they said to me that they didn't want to let me down because the environment felt so positive that it made them want to show their best musicianship."

Alvin spoke of the importance of the culture in the orchestra pit when explained that there are three things he hopes to have in a gig: good music, good pay, and what he described as "the hang." Most of the time getting two of those things is good enough, but if you can get all three, you "really hit the jackpot." Zane, in a similar line of reasoning, explained that "everyone sounds better when they're happy. And it's so easy to make everybody happy. Let's just do that."

Unfortunately, examples of a negative orchestra culture were also shared. For example, one participant shared the story of a "rhythm section that flat out refused to play with each

other.” In that instance “outside mediators from the Union” were brought in to facilitate, “can we get you to play the show tonight?” A different participant shared the story of playing keyboards in the orchestra of a long-running musical where there was “infighting” among the string players. “If it weren’t for my friends, the guitar player and the drummer also sitting beside me, I think I would have gone mad.”

The Broadway Company

Andrea compared the responsibility of maintaining a positive orchestra culture to a “corporate experience.” A Broadway show, she explained, is a “company... not ‘company of actors’ the way that we often talk about a company. It’s a corporate experience. It is a job that you show up at that lasts for a long time.” This experience can be challenging for musicians who are used to freelance work and changing working environments. Thus, beyond maintaining a positive workplace environment, the music director is a manager in a very corporate sense. With that comes the responsibility of having positive interactions with other members of the company beyond those who work in the orchestra pit. Alvin feels that it is important to develop those relationships. “The fact that you got a hundred people—give or take—and we’re all trapped in a windowless theater. Dark. You become a family” so it is important to get to know that family by “going out to dinner with someone you don’t know... and [to] learn from other people’s experiences.” Justin, described the experience as being the same team. “I like to think of a production as a team. It’s not about one person, it’s about how we all work together. It’s also more fun just to have a happy work environment where there’s respect and love and joy, and we can make each other better at work.” Steven experienced a positive company culture when he started working at *Once on This Island*. A member of the writing team, lyricist Lynn Ahrens, welcomed him by saying “this is Steven. He’s going to be joining us on ‘the island.’”

Building that company culture is something Haley believes the music director needs to actively support.

It is a leadership position... you have the ability to help create whatever environment you want to create. And I think that is sometimes overlooked, but actually a very important element of the job as well. It's making sure that the people around you feel comfortable and supported in the way that they need, to be able to do the best that they can in the show.

Managing Subs

A recurring challenge in long running productions is managing the influx of substitute musicians. There are specific rules, laid out by the musician's union which dictate how this process plays out. In short, each individual musician within an orchestra is responsible for identifying and training their substitutes. However, the music director (defined as the conductor in the union's Collective Bargaining Agreement) has the final say in approving, or "finding unacceptable" any substitute player in order to "maintain the musical integrity of the show" (Collective Bargaining Agreement, 2016, p. 15). Managing the roster of approved subs, and keeping track of who is in or out on any given night is an administratively complex responsibility. This fact was brought up numerous times across the interviews and focus group discussions. Andrea Grody described this succinctly when she stated, "Managing a Broadway pit is managing subs. That's the job." Haley talked about the need to be organized in order to "figure out when you'll be having subs in as a conductor." (See Chapter 6 for a continued discussion of what it is like to work as a sub—one potential entry point for a career as a music director.)

Andrea described how she has been preparing to manage subs while still in the pre-production stage of her upcoming show, *Suffs*, by preparing a click track to use in rehearsals:

I'm preparing a click map for the show...to make the show sustainable because there's so many places where the tempos change within a song, from one song to the other. There are no breaks. To make it sub-able, I have to get some safeguards for people. It's just not feasible to ask the drummer to come in if they haven't been playing it every day. So, I

have to build that, and the plan is to build it so that we can do a test run before we start rehearsal, so we can use it in rehearsals.

Alvin talked about subs as a necessity in New York City. When he started playing his first full-time show in New York City he had the mentality that he needed to play for every single show.

I had to be talked to. I had to be sat down by Broadway veterans, once I got my first Broadway show, who said, 'no, no, no, there's this thing called subbing.' [Laughter] It exists. There's so many talented people in the city that you know, you gotta share the wealth.

In a focus group discussion Alvin added,

I'm sure there are folks who have done *Wicked* who have done *Phantom*, who have done these super long running shows—and it's amazing, it's financially stable—but you don't wanna get stuck playing the same thing eight times a week for 20 years.

In fact, the union's bylaws articulate several reasons for allowing regular musicians to sub out of performances. The contract specifically lists those reasons as "(a) obtaining occasional outside employment of limited duration; (b) avoiding boredom, which may occur in a long-running show; (c) Avoiding loss of identity in the marketplace" (Collective Bargaining Agreement, 2016).

Maintaining the Show

Another feature of the open-ended run is the need to maintain the performance standards over a long period of time. The music director is responsible for ensuring that the quality of the performance of the music is kept at a high level. A focus group participant explained, "once your show is mounted, a huge part of being a music director is maintaining a show." Numerous examples were given of what that maintenance looks like, including giving notes, watching the show in the house, or managing put-ins to name a few.

David explained that when the creative team leaves (once a show has opened),

The music director, the director, and the choreographer... their work remains and defines what the show is. So, the conductor is the person who carries out the vision... I should say, not just carries out, but maintains the vision of the music director.

He continued by explaining that, likewise,

The PSM (Production Stage Manager) or the associate director carries out what the director does... and the associate choreographer/the dance captain/resident choreographer, whoever's there maintains what the choreographer does.

Thus, the maintenance of a show is a team effort with the music director/conductor having primary responsibility over the musical elements of the show. Cynthia broke down those musical elements into three categories: "Keeping the standards of the band high; keeping the standards of the vocals high; [and] keeping the sound design where it needs to be."

A standard way to do such quality control is through giving notes. That is, written or spoken communications with company members regarding the performance of the music. Haley explained that "one of the important things that an MD has to do... is continue to audit and note the show and give feedback and work on things so that the show stays at the same quality level that it was when it opens." Ted explained that there are "always new people playing [in the pit], and I'm always giving them notes." Zane talked about checking in on a show that had been running for a while only to find performers taking liberties, such as extending a riff or making other changes from what was originally rehearsed. "But that's not what we wrote, or you've edited or changed. And now this little fermata that was supposed to take four, five seconds max is now turning into a whole [gestures with his arms wide open]." In such instances, he explains, it's important to tell the performer, "This is not about you, it's about the show." Cynthia described another form of preparing to give notes by sitting at the soundboard and using headphones to listen to the individual feed of an actor's microphone. "I know by year four or five of *The Lion King*... one of my jobs was to solo individual singers from the board" in order to police "the ensemble situation because parts had migrated drastically."

Another way that a music director helps to maintain a production and give notes is by occasionally sitting in the audience to experience the show from the audience's perspective. The experience of sitting in the audience is very different from sitting in the conductor's chair because the show sounds different. Steven explained that he has worked with musicians who "have been disappointed with what it sounded like when they actually watch the show because they're playing a really complicated pattern here, or they've worked and practiced so hard for this one song. And then, you can barely hear what they play" from in the house. Andrea described a similar experience when she had the chance to sit in the house during technical rehearsals and realized that a musical moment that she had been focusing on turned out to be not as important as she thought when taken within the context of the overall production. "Now I have to think about it differently. I was like, okay, let me step back, see from your perspective and then come back into [my] music brain and figure [out] how we can help."

Zane likes to consider the audience's perspective when he is listening in the house. "Do I need to go to sound and say, 'I don't hear the high-hat' or... is the bass drum too damn loud?"

Ted Arthur explained that listening in the house is in his contract.

In my contract I sit out once a week in the house and watch the show and note the show. A lot of it is maintenance of the show from a vocal standpoint, but also from a music standpoint with the instruments.

A focus group member described the importance of figuring out the staffing of the music team—conductors, associate conductors, etc. in order to determine things like "who's gonna play the put in. Are you gonna play? Are you gonna take notes in the house?" Andrea explained that she will "sit out and watch the show a decent amount during previews" in her upcoming production because she "needs that." David told a story of listening in the house during the run

of *Billy Elliot* only to discover that the sound operator “didn’t like the trumpets in a section... he just lowered the fader” instead of bringing the music director into the conversation.

Put-ins

Yet another aspect of the open-ended run is the necessity of preparing actors to join the company as replacements. This process is called a put-in rehearsal. Justin explains,

I don't like to think about so much as like ‘plug and play.’ It's easy to see it that way, that the part is right there on the page. You have to sing it that way. Like, sure, that is technically correct, but we're not robots. And so some person's way into the material will be different than their predecessor and will be different than anybody else. They're unique to who they are. And so It's fun, to me, to get a new cast member sometimes because the show will inevitably change, even if it's on a micro level, you know? But it affects the overall sound, affects the vibe. And it's important to acknowledge that while still maintaining what the show is.

This section has covered the complexities involved in working on a long-running show—a feature that is not part of the job for music directors in most contexts outside of Broadway. As has been shown, the music directors who participated in this research study describe the many varying aspects of dealing with the long run: the repetition of material from night to night (as something either loved or tolerated), the changing nature of the show from night to night, the need to foster a culture within the orchestra and the company as a whole, the administratively complex task of managing subs, all while working to maintain the performance standards of the company at a high level. This is the first of several features that emerges from the data collected for this study and provides a more detailed look than what was uncovered in the literature review (see pages 19-20 of Chapter 2).

5.3 The High Stakes Environment

As Andrea put it, “music directing a Broadway show is a huge deal.” Multiple factors contribute to the feeling that high stakes feeling that is associated with working on Broadway.

Ted Sperling, in a focus group discussion, explained it this way:

When you've taken a show either from a regional theater to Broadway or you're starting cold on Broadway, I just think the pressure probably feels higher. You know this is your shot to get it right. And the costs are very high. And the Union rules and rates dictate a lot. So, I think one of the jobs of a responsible and experienced music director on Broadway is to try to navigate those rules and rates to the advantage of the show. Not to waste money, not to waste time.

Alvin in that same focus group brought up the fact that Broadway shows are under pressure to turn a profit. “We're in a capitalist world, and a lot of Broadway shows are designed to make money. So, the way it's structured is designed around that.”

Another contributing factor to the high pressure of a Broadway show is the fact that the standards are high. Alvin, for example, described a scenario where someone was fired in the middle of a rehearsal. Zane, likewise explained, “once you muck up on a big level, you're really not gonna get a second chance.” He added that, “I think you'd be hard pressed to find anybody that's now sitting in the MD chair that has never MD'd anything, or assisted, or anything before, because it's just too dangerous.”

Broadway shows also run on tight timelines. “Musical directors or supervisors have to handle their business as quickly and as thoroughly as possible so that everybody else can do their job efficiently,” explained Zane. That fast timeline is especially noticeable during the preview period, as Ted Sperling described:

Once you get into previews... you only have around six to eight useful rehearsals to make changes because you can't rehearse on matinee days. You can't rehearse on days off. And at a certain point you have to freeze the show a few days before the critics come. So, in a four- or five-week preview process—which is all you get usually—you only have those first three weeks, really. And then you only have maybe three days per week, and it's only five hours. And then you subtract time for getting in and out of wigs or mics. It's a very small number of hours of rehearsal. And everything takes forever! Because any change you make to staging or music probably means re-teching and re-lighting. And we know that that doesn't go so fast. So, you can maybe make two changes in a five-hour rehearsal, you know? So, you have to pick the 10 changes that are gonna fix your show. So that pressure, I think, is greater with the clock ticking towards opening night and the ultimate opening night beyond which you can't really fix anything.

The music director is also often involved in the budgeting for a Broadway show. These budget discussions are driven by the producer of the show, who is looking to keep costs down in order to sustain a show. David, for example, told the story of working with a producer who wanted him to negotiate a smaller number of musicians for the orchestra of a Broadway revival. That negotiation was with the estate that controlled the copyright to the show. The producer asked David to say that “the show will sound better with fewer musicians.” David replied, “I cannot say ‘will sound better,’ but I can say it will sound fantastic... we can find an approach to how to do it with fewer musicians that will sound great. But I cannot say it will sound better.”

Another important consideration in managing budgets is working with orchestrators who are paid according to the number of measures or number of pages that are orchestrated. Costs can quickly escalate when re-orchestrating a song, or to even asking for another arrangement or another key. John exclaimed, “I’ve had to learn to budget! But why can’t we, just, you know, have everything? You know, arrange the music seven different ways? Well, because then you pay for it seven times!” Andrea has taken this lesson to heart because, “making any change is very costly. Time. Energy. Money.” So, she tries to carefully plan which music is sent to the orchestrator. “The goal is not to release something to the orchestrator until you know it’s not gonna change—and you never know it’s not gonna change. Everything’s gonna change until opening night. But I try *not* to release a song... we’re *not* sure of.”

Working with Stars/Managing Egos

Another feature of a Broadway production that can contribute to the high-stakes nature of the job is the fact that the music director is often working with stars. Zane explained how he can support a star in a show, who might ask for support if they aren’t feeling well by paying attention

and changing tempos or other aspects of the performance as needed. Carmel, a focus group participant, described working with Idina Menzel in the Broadway production of *If/Then*:

There's little-old-me, who's the music director, and then there's [this] giant star, Idina Menzel and I'm having to make sure that the show is still the show. But leave her enough wiggle room to make sure that she's being taken care of, and that she's still being empowered to give her best show and not wanting to rein her in at all.

The Union (Local 802)

Another contributing factor to the feeling of a high-stakes environment is related to the rules associated with the musicians Union. For example, Andrea explained,

There's a point where you get designated. And what being designated means is that you're basically considered a regular player. It allows more flexibility for other subs. So, every pit has its own structure of when you can sub out and not, and you have to work around everybody.

The Union rules also apply to the work that copyists and orchestrators do. For example, Haley talked about the confusion she felt with those rules when she was first starting out.

I had a lot of conversations with some of the main copyists, for example, about what the line was in terms of what should be done in the rehearsal room? What is something that is a union job that goes to a copyist?

The union rules also designate the hierarchy of the music team within a production and within the orchestra pit. For example, David explained that, “from a union and financial standpoint, the choreographer and the director are very much aligned in term of how they’re treated by producers and the music director has been completely shunted aside.” Ted Sperling added, “You’re a boss in the eyes of the union, but you’re not the boss, Caesar.” In short, the union plays a large role in determining the structure of a Broadway orchestra including house minimums, weekly pay schedules, rules surrounding subs and other details.

Visibility in the Press/Media

Beyond the high stakes nature of the working environment in a Broadway show, an additional factor that contributes to this feeling is the high visibility given to Broadway productions in television and print media. Take for example the fact that every musical nominated for the “best musical” Tony Award performs a number to a nationally televised audience. Alvin talked about the Tony Awards weekend being one time when he has a chance to interact with other music directors from other shows because they all come together under one roof for that one night. “That’s one of the best things for me, at least about that Tony time, that the few days up to the Tony’s and the actual day to say, hey! You get to see folks from other shows.”

Ted Arthur described how part of his job was preparing the cast for a performance on *The View*. “You know, we just did *The View* recently... it was like a month of talking about what we were gonna do, how it was gonna happen... a lot of emails behind the scenes.” Another example he shared was preparing to perform on television for the annual Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade. “Usually, it’ll come down from the producers... we’re gonna do this song and we’re gonna do it in 3 minutes and 10 seconds because that’s what’s on TV we’re allowed.” In preparing for situations like that he describes the work as being “the traffic cop of everything... the orchestrator is talking to you, the composer is talking to you... the director, the choreographer.”

To summarize, the high-stakes nature with a Broadway production is related to a number of factors. Broadway shows are considered the model for the best of theater. Thus, they are given extra exposure in the media be it on television or in print along with the possibility of working with famous actors. Additionally, the rules of the musician’s union, the large budgets, and tight

timelines of Broadway shows adds to that pressure. This high-stakes environment is another feature that stands out as another feature of Broadway shows that might not exist in other theatrical contexts.

5.4 Collaboration

“It’s like being a music producer,” explains Joe, “your musical knowledge gets absorbed into the other aspects of the production and when a show is really—together with all the departments—really clicking as one and together. That’s what makes it magic.” That magic—working together with others to create something that no one person could have done on their own is one of the reasons people love working in musical theater. Therefore, the ability to collaborate with others is an essential part of the job. The collaboration in a Broadway musical takes many forms: the collaboration within a department (i.e. the music team), collaboration amongst the creative team (director, choreographer, music director), and the collaboration that occurs after the show opens and the creative team leaves (in particular with the stage manager).

The Creative Team Leaves

The literature review (see chapter 2) discussed the importance of the collaboration between the members of the creative team. Once the show opens, however, the music director is the only member of the creative team who is still involved in the day-to-day operation of the show. This fact means that the nature of the job changes after a show has opened. This idea came up multiple times in the interviews. John explained, “You know you’re just sort of the last person left in the building. And so, then a lot of people start to come to you with a lot of different things.” Therefore, he explained, the music director—especially if she or he is conducting the show daily—ends up being a “force that’s working through all these worlds.” A member of a

focus group discussion jokingly explained, “as the show progresses and the creative team disappears [laughter from the group] they leave us with all the mess.”

Zane explained that once the creative team leaves, an important relationship exists between the music director and the Production Stage Manager (PSM). “There's a director, choreographer, actors, singers, and then you have all your musicians that you're responsible for. And then when all of them leave, it's basically you and the stage manager that's basically running the entire show.”

Steven described the job of a music director—once a show is up and running—as being the “driver” of the show. “The keyboard-conductor drives the show and can help navigate how the show is moving. The pace it's going at. And problem solving in the moment.” In a Broadway orchestra pit, there is usually at least one camera focused on the music director. The resulting video feed might be displayed for members of the orchestra if they don't have a direct line of sight. The video feed is frequently displayed on screens in the house so that members of the on-stage cast can easily see the music director for cues and tempos. Likewise, the PSM keeps an eye on the video feed of the conductor. As Steven explained, “they're watching us the entire time and taking counts and cues off of us.” Knowing that many eyes are on you when you're conducting a show leads to a lot of pressure. Steven further explained,

The camera is always on the conductor, and so many different people are watching the conductor. So, there's a lot of pressure on you. Good pressure. But you have to have a certain mind frame to not break down under that sort of pressure.

David explained this concept by saying,

You and the PSM—you as the conductor, and I'm saying that as opposed to music director—but in the current parlance, you are the person who is coordinating the way the show moves cue to cue, and not just the songs, obviously, but all of the underscores, all of the scene change music, all the dances, all the tempos.

Beyond the collaboration in-performance between the PSM and the music director there is additional collaboration in terms of running the company. Ted explained that in that role,

You have to make sure people are doing what they're supposed to be doing, and you have to have authority. Nobody wants somebody weak in that position. So that's a good balancing act one has to define.

David also spoke of this concept when he said, "your responsibility is to be the communications hub, both in the pit and outside the pit... between the actors in the band, between the PSM and the band. Between the crew and the band."

Justin Mendoza explained that he often looks to the PSM for help. "I defer to... the PSM about how to handle a situation, even though that's not technically their department. I will often go to them for advice." He explains that he has developed a good relationship with the PSM and that he learns a lot from them.

The Composer

As was mentioned in the literature review, a feature that can be unique to a Broadway show is the fact that the music director might be collaborating with a living composer. Outside of New York, in many theaters—especially when mounting revivals of musicals, the creative team only has access to the printed materials and not any living members of the writing team. Carmel brought up this concept in one of the focus group discussions:

When you're doing a show within the larger umbrella of Broadway... you usually have access to the creators. Either they're alive, or if you're doing a revival, if they're still alive, consult with them, or you can consult with the estate and get permission. People who are doing shows in other places just get the materials... in this setting you can go back to the source.

Andrea Grody explained that she feels that her job, as a music director, is to ensure that the composer trusts her with their work.

I earn that trust by, at the beginning, asking a lot of questions, and figuring out that balance between saying what I think and saying to the composer, what do you think? And

I earn that trust by checking in with the composer regularly, showing them that I value what they have to say, and will listen to them, which also comes with listening to them and taking their notes.

David, in contrast to that type of situation, described how many modern Broadway shows have a living composer, but that person isn't really involved in the day-to-day process of putting the show together:

Sometimes, maybe, you do have a composer, a living composer. But it's Elton John. And Elton John doesn't show up at the theater except for opening night. And hands you a recording of, well, here's the songs I wrote. Do whatever you want with it, which is what he said on *Billy Elliot*.

He explained, therefore, that the music director might become the person who has to make all sorts of musical decisions. "Somebody is having to be the musical force... that goes back to the issue of what is the definition of a music director? But that's what the definition of music director should be, but it no longer is." David's argument is supported by McHugh (2015) who, as explained in the literature review, declared that Broadway music directors might be better described as "composer-collaborators."

Artistic Vision (Directorial Point-of-View)

This idea of a music director who understand that the music needs to support the overall production and the storytelling of the production is another idea that came up in terms of thinking about the collaborative process of putting up a musical. For example, Zane explained:

I'm always trying to make it better, you know. Looking for help. Whether I actually say, can you help me? What do you think it should be? You know how you know. How can we execute this better? But... you can't have 300 people bombarding you with ideas and things... you do finally have to make a decision to say, all right, we're going with this plan. And it might not be your plan. You might be a little upset. This is what's best for the show.

He further explained that in those moments of decision making,

As musical director or supervisor, it's your job to go... is this moment supporting the show or not? And I do a lot of shows from scratch—so, is this song making any sense

right now? Then, no, we have to get rid of it. And the way you're executing this song, the lyrics, that verse, what did we gain from that? Nothing? It has to go.

David really hammered in the point about having that directorial point of view by telling the story of the collaboration he experienced on the 1999 production of *Kiss Me, Kate*:

Michael Blakemore was the director. I, in this case, was the dance and vocal arranger, and Paul Gemignani was the music director. About three to four months before we started working, before we started rehearsals, when everybody was sort of—maybe it was more than that—but when everybody was still formulating their approach to the show, Michael Blakemore called the entire creative team into a room just for a meeting, and said, ‘I want everything you do, every choice you make, every decision you make... Think about how that, how this one phrase helps define what you do, which is that *Kiss Me, Kate* is a story about the battle between the sexes, between a man and a woman and how they interact. So, every dance step, every costume design, everything. Every piece of music. Think about how that impacts your decision.’

And the immediate answer is, of course, well, I don't know how that impacts. But of course, it actually informs everything because you're focused on this central story of Lilli and Fred, or you know, Petruchio and Kate, and how they are equals and how they interact. That is a directorial point of view. And obviously, then you as the music director, you, as the music team, have to figure out what that means in the way that you interpret that. And it helped the actors and helped the orchestrator and helped the arrangers and helped the... everybody. Even the choreographer.

Ultimately, David declared, “you're not making these decisions independently, you're making these decisions in the context of an entire creative point of view. Now, does that mean that every single show has a creative point of view? No. Should it? Yes.”

David also shared a dramatic example of what can go wrong when a show doesn't have that directorial point of view, a lesson he learned when working on *Seussical*, a musical that closed “in less than six months at a loss of \$10.5 million” (Pogrebin, July 18, 2001). David explained that there was no overarching directorial point of view in that production.

It showed in the performance, in the final product. Especially given that they fired the costume designer the second they put the costumes on. They fired the set designer, and they fired the director during previews in New York. Because there was no point of view. There was no directorial approach.

This idea that the music director should support the overall creative vision of the director is a theme that frequently came up in the literature (Church, 2015; Fox, 2015; Lacamoire, 2016; Laster, 2001; Marshall, 2016; Morley, 2011; Nestor, 2011). Working on a Broadway show, therefore, includes an intense level of collaboration: collaboration with the other members of the creative team, collaboration with the Production Stage manager, collaboration with the Composer, and of course, collaboration with the Director.

5.5 Other Findings

Beyond the topics already covered in the chapter, the data also revealed additional concepts that seem to be somewhat unique to the experience of working on Broadway. These include: the out-of-town tryout, the preview period, the use of ever-changing technology, and the changing nature of the job. These aspects of a Broadway production were not highlighted in the literature review.

Out of Town Tryouts

Given the high cost of producing a musical in New York City, and the increased scrutiny given to Broadway productions by the media, many Broadway shows begin their life outside of New York City. This gives the creative team a chance to work on the show with performances in front of audiences away from the high pressure of New York. Often, the creative team—including the music director—will work on the show out of town and then come back to New York for the Broadway production. This idea came up frequently in the interviews. For example, Haley described being involved with “the Toronto production” of *& Juliet* before it came to New York. “For the Toronto production I was around a bit, starting to learn the show, and then fully 100 percent boots on the ground from the start of the Broadway rehearsal process.” Likewise, Haley worked on the out-of-town *Porgy and Bess* as an intern for the “American Repertory Theater”

production which meant she was “able to come help out a bit for the Broadway production.”

Cynthia described a fairly long out of town tryout of 4 or 5 months for her first Broadway show, *The Gershwins' Fascinating Rhythm* in Hartford, Connecticut before the show had its Broadway premiere.

The Preview Period

Before a Broadway show officially opens, there is a period of rehearsals known as previews during which the cast is performing the show at night for audiences of paying customers, while still rehearsing the show during the day. Another way to think of the preview period is an extended set of dress rehearsals. A Broadway preview period normally lasts about one month. During that time the creative team are putting, what they hope will be, the final touches on a show before the official opening night when the show is “frozen” or no more changes are made. A quote from Ted Sperling was previously shared describing the pressure he feels during previews (see page ??FILL IN). Alvin declared that the preview period is “somewhat unique” to Broadway. He continued:

New York audiences are really smart. And preview audiences are really forgiving. And they're understanding of... hey! The show might stop. We may have a difficulty. I think having that grace and that ability to kind of be free. Because... [Sometimes] that first preview is your first run. Because Tech was such a slog, and you didn't get through everything, and you haven't run the entire show, you know, all the way through. And that first preview crowd is... There's usually a speech... ‘we might have to stop the show.’ And I think those are some of the beautiful things about theater. And having that experience to do that in New York on Broadway is really special.

Ever Changing Technology

The use of and types of technology used in Broadway orchestra pits has evolved over time. This means that the job of the music director has also changed over time. Zane explained, “When we did *Bring in ‘da Noise, Bring in ‘da Funk*, there was no Mainstage software or anything like that. I had a rack of keyboards and a control. I pressed the button and it sent a

whole bunch of stuff to a rack of actual keyboards. Not software instruments.” Today shows use computer programs, such as Mainstage, which uses software instruments that are controlled either by a laptop or some other triggering device such as a foot pedal to send the sounds to the keyboard being played. Haley described how “a lot of shows now also use Ableton or some sort of technology like that to queue click tracks” so, she says it’s important to have a “comfort level with that technology.”

Zane, in a focus group discussion explained that as a music director you don’t necessarily have to be an expert at using all of the various technologies, but you should have a an understanding of how they work:

You have to admit that knowing Finale and knowing programming—whether you're good at it or not—makes you a better musical director. You have to understand what that other person's job is. They're not gonna be able to program these five songs in two hours. They need time. That means the whole band has to stop, be quiet and let them do what they have to do or get it into Finale... I started as a copyist on Broadway, and back in those days it was onion skin, ink razors, pen... you know? ... And someone wanted to transpose the key? We'll be back tomorrow, you know? So I understand that. But I will also say, because I know how to copy music by hand, and I'm okay in Finale, and because I know how to program keyboards—'cause I'm a keyboard player first—I did all of this before. I think that makes me a better musical director.

A challenge that arises, as a result of the use of technology, is that something can go wrong with the keyboards or computers in the middle of a performance, but the music director needs to keep the show going. Justin, for example, explained that “if technology fails or my keyboard stops working in the middle of a show—which happened a couple of months ago— and not panicking and still being, you know, maintaining the show.” Zane, similarly talked about working with a drum machine that stopped functioning during a performance. “And we still play through it, you know?!”

The use of technology also has a downside, in that fewer musicians are needed to create a big sound. Alvin, while discussing this idea, talked about the fact that producers want to

highlight the fact that live musicians are playing the show. But, when the musicians are placed on stage—so they are visible, “you’ve actually hired fewer people to do the job because you want to put them on stage.” Technology helps make this possible because a few keyboards can replicate the sound of entire orchestra sections. This concept emerged in the literature review in Meffe’s (2011) article, which examined the shrinking size of Broadway orchestra pits.

Zane, speaking of the keyboards used in a Broadway pits, added that is important to understand not just the actual keyboard technology, but how, as player to manipulate the sounds in ways that imitate how orchestral instruments might be played. “It might just be one note that you have to play. But now you have to manipulate that sound and all these different other ways. So it's not finger keyboard stuff. It's the whole keyboard universe.”

In discussion the technology used in Broadway, David talked about not being a fan of click tracks because they remove some of the human element out of the performance because “the click track doesn’t allow you to adjust in any meaningful way because tempo is not absolute, you know?” This is an interesting contrast to Church (2015) who, in the literature review, described that click tracks can potentially address a common area of conflict with choreographers who might complain about changing tempos.

Stick-Conducting (Rarity)

A major change in the profession of Broadway music directors over the past several decades has been the move away from a stand-alone conductor to the keyboard/conductor. Steven explained, “Keyboard conducting wasn’t the thing in the past. And now it’s sort of like the basics to be a MD. And stick conducting is actually sort of rare now.” Andrea was more direct in her assessment: “The chances of you doing a show where you're not playing at all is

almost zero in today's world. *Sweeney Todd* is one of the rare shows that has a stick conductor right now, and the idea that you wouldn't be at the piano at all is so unlikely.”

John Bell, described how in his own career he has had the opportunity to “stick-conduct” shows. But he recognizes that this isn’t the norm today. “I’m fortunate in my career that that’s sort of what I am known for... I conduct shows with large orchestras.” But, he added, “a lot of shows now don’t have that requirement.”

5.6 Summary of Chapter 5

This chapter, focused on the first research question, The Job. A particular focus was made on those elements of the job of a music director that are different or unique for Broadway as compared to other theatrical situations. For example, Broadway shows are known for their long-runs. Working on a Broadway show often means working in a high-stakes environment. The nature of the collaborative relationships within a production can also be different on Broadway. Other features that might be unique to Broadway shows were also discussed including the out-of-town tryout, the preview period and the ever-changing use of technology in Broadway orchestra pits.

Chapter 6: Research Question 2—The Journey

*Years of dreams just can't be wrong
Arms will open wide
I'll be safe and wanted
Finally, home where I belong
Well, starting now I'm learning fast
On this journey to the past
(from Anastasia by Ahrens and Flaherty)*

This chapter will examine the insights revealed from the individual interviews and focus group discussions related to the second research question which asks: What pathways do Broadway music directors take in order to (a) develop the necessary skills and (b) end up working on Broadway? The information revealed by the literature review suggested that there is an overlap between the development of the skills and the path that leads to working on Broadway. In other words, the skills needed for the job are developed through experiences that are had while working up the ladder towards the position of music director. This chapter will highlight a number of striking similarities that can be seen across the experiences of the participants as they navigated their own career pathways. Differences among the experiences will also be explored. Finally, this chapter will conclude with a discussion of a number of barriers that exist which could present potential roadblocks to individuals who wish to pursue a career as a music director—specifically on Broadway.

6.1 The Decision

As was highlighted in the short introductions (see chapter 4), nearly every participant shared either an experience or a moment of realization that led them to pursue a career in the performing arts. While not every participant was initially interested, specifically, in a career as a music director, in general they all had a desire to work in music or theater. The notable exceptions are Ted Arthur, who initially planned to pursue a career in broadcast journalism (but

it should be noted that he did double major in piano performance) and Haley who studied psychology and was considering a career in arts and education. Even in those two cases, they both continued participating in or pursuing experiences related to music and theater while considering alternative career pathways. Across all of the interviews is found a similar love of the performing arts which ultimately pulled each individual to pursue a career in music and theater. These experiences line up nicely with the theoretical framework of the Theory of Expertise (as explained in chapter 1) in which the path towards a professional career—or expertise, begins with the decision to chase after that dream.

A common phrase used to describe the feeling a person has when they fall in love with musical theater (also mentioned in the literature review, Chapter 2) is that they are “bitten by the bug” and then participating in the art form becomes something that they just have to do. In the individual interviews the participants were asked whether they remembered being bitten by the bug, and if so to share the story. Many of those stories were shared in chapter 4. Table 18, below, provides an overview of the participants’ responses to that question. It is interesting to note that some participants were adamant that they had *not* been bitten by the bug.

Table 19: Bitten by the Musical Theater Bug (or not)?

Yes! I was bitten by the bug.	...or, maybe not?
Alvin: His teenage years playing for the theater camp, beginning with <i>Tommy</i> as a 13-year-old.	Joseph: “No, I never was.” Later, he said, “if I caught the musical theater bug it was in college with <i>West Side Story</i> .”
Ted A.: Seeing <i>Sound of Music</i> on NBC and declaring, “this is what I wanted to do.”	Cynthia: “No. I was most definitely not. And in fact, I would say I pretty actively turned my nose up at musical theater for a pretty good long time.”
Zane: Sitting in the middle of the band with his father who played in the orchestra for original production of <i>Hair</i> in 1969.	David: “I think it wasn’t that I fell in love with musical theater... I fell in love with all the fun challenges of listening to things and trying to figure out what I was hearing.”
Steven: Seeing <i>Beauty and the Beast</i> on Broadway in the 5th grade	Ted S. “I’m not one of those people who was taken to a show, and instantly knew this is for me. So that’s not my version.”
Justin: Seeing a national tour of <i>Les Misérables</i> in the 8th grade. “That rocked my world.”	John: I don’t know that there’s one event in my life. Because, when I was a kid, my parents were not big theater people. But they just are into the arts... So we always went to shows... it was just always around and considered important that you know about this.”
Andrea: “I want to be that person...” seeing Kim Gribsby on TV conducting at the Tony Awards.	
Haley: Age 10 as a child actor in <i>Ragtime</i> at Maine State Music Theater	

What is fascinating about the responses from those who declared they had not been bitten by the bug, is the fact that as the interviews progressed, it became abundantly clear that every participant enjoyed working in musical theater and were proud of their successes and experiences as Broadway music directors.

In addition to these stories of being bitten (or not) by the musical theater bug, a number of participants described the influence their music teachers, theater teachers, or even church music leaders had on their decision to pursue a career in the performing arts. Some of these types of experiences were already shared in the brief portraits (see chapter 4). Additional examples

include Ted S. who described being “drafted in middle school and high school to be part of the school's productions.” Joe talked about the influence of a high school teacher who opened his eyes to the wonder of music. “A few of us would hang out with him, and he said, ‘listen to that’ as he’d point out the things in Beethoven. ‘Now let me play you the Rolling Stones,’ and he’d show us the same things were in that music!” Justin described the gratitude he has for his childhood piano teacher—and that he loved those lessons. In fact, he explained that he “reunited with her, maybe 4 years ago, back in San Francisco when we had coffee. It was amazing.” Alvin, likewise, described his gratitude and admiration for the organist at his church who helped him develop his skills during his teenage years. “I went every Sunday. We had rehearsals. He would show me things in rehearsal with the choir... and it was amazing.”

For a number of participants, a big part of the decision to pursue a career in the performing arts also included the decision to move to New York City and try to “make it” there. While several of the participants either grew up in or near New York City, among those who did not grow up there, stories were shared of the move to the city and trying to figure out how to break into the theater scene. Ted Arthur, for example, explained that the move to New York was difficult.

Coming to New York and not knowing anybody, trying to make it, and being shut down. Or, just not finding work. And I remember there were weeks where I would wake up on Monday and have nothing on my calendar for the rest of the week and thinking, “what am I gonna do?”

Joe Church—who grew up in New York—mentioned that after college when he came back to the city, he set a goal for himself.

I had an approach, then, which was, I'll give this such and such amount of time, and if I'm not making a complete living, if I'm not meeting my bills during that time, I'll give it up, and I'll go back to school and get my doctorate.

Justin, even after moving to New York, described being scared to admit to himself that he wanted a career in music.

When I moved to New York, it was mostly because my partner at the time wanted to move to New York. I was actually content with staying in San Francisco. But he said, no, we gotta move to New York. That's where our dreams are... I was almost afraid to actively say, I want to be a music director. I was just kind of hoping that I would find my place. And hoping that that place would be music direction of some kind.

Cynthia, describing that first day in New York—the day her ex-boyfriend forgot to pick her up at the airport—said, “it happened to be just shortly before 8 o'clock... I don't know a soul. There's nobody, you know? This is pre-cellphones. So, I just was kind of freaking out to be honest.”

David described being scared of New York City before moving there.

My college roommate had moved to New York. I visited. Subways are filled with graffiti. There's trash everywhere... I still don't really have a sense of what my marketable skills are other than I can play piano.

Whatever their feelings about the city or moving there, every participant had a desire to put in the effort to make it. Alvin might have put it best when he explained, “Yes, move to the city. No one knows me. Do I belong here? Let me show you I do.”

6.2 The Gateway

*Now don't dawdle, Amaryllis, play your exercise
Sol - do - la - re - ti - mi
A little slower and please
Keep the fingers curved as nice
And as high as you possibly can.
(from The Music Man by Meredith Wilson)*

Everyone has to begin somewhere. For Broadway music directors, based on what was learned in these interviews, this usually means that someone gives you your first opportunity—your first gig. That first opportunity opens the door to the possibility of a career on Broadway. This section will explore not only the scrappiness that participants demonstrated in order to find an entry point, but also what those entry points might look like.

One practically definitive attribute that emerges is the importance of piano skills. For nearly every participant the ability to play the piano is what led to their first professional opportunities and set them on the path towards a Broadway career. Even those participants who described alternative entry points into the pathway extolled the importance of piano skills in the profession. Additionally, as will be shown, there is an element of luck or happenstance in which they were in the right place at the right time and had the right skill set (usually piano). A piece of advice given by many of the participants is that in the early stages of a career it is important to say “yes” to almost every possible gig that comes your way.

The Hustle/Scrappiness

A natural question that arises is how to get that first opportunity? What does a person need to do in order to find that first opportunity? A characteristic that was displayed by many of the participants in this study is an element of scrappiness or a willingness to put in effort to seek out connections and opportunities. The examples of a willingness to hustle, as shared by the participants, line up nicely with the seven suggestions proposed by Morley (2011) in the literature review (see Chapter 2).

Cynthia, for example, described how in the mid-1990s when she was starting out, she would go to the Times Square neighborhood when audiences were leaving the theaters so that she could fish discarded Playbill programs out of trash bins. She would then look through the programs to find the names of individuals playing piano or keyboards for Broadway shows.

I would cold call people, introduce myself [and] say that I'm interested in breaking into the Broadway scene, and could I come watch your book, or take you to coffee, or meet you outside the stage door at some point?

She then kept a record, using notecards, of every person she called and what their response was. “Every couple of weeks I would go through those cards again and see who I hadn't called in a

while. Who haven't I followed up in a while? So that's sort of how I got started.” Cynthia, describing those early days in New York said, “I had such a singular focus, and I was so into that hustle and so sure that I could get better.” Another example of Cynthia’s drive to break into the field came in a story she told of being, at first, rebuffed by a music director that she approached to ask for lessons in playing the piano in popular styles:

I sat with that for a week or so, and then I came back and said... ‘I just wanna let you know I am really good, and I think I'm worth your while. So, I did end up taking some lessons with him. And I will never forget, I actually played him one of the Gershwin song Transcriptions, and he was like, ‘Oh, you can really play.’ I'm like, yes! Thank you. I can really play, you know? [laughs]

Ted A., described himself as someone who was willing to figure out how to work in New York and make the right connections.

I feel like I'm a fairly ambitious person. And so, I just dug in to that more about networking and meeting people and doing what I can and taking opportunities when they came, even if they were free. And I think that helped me to get a footing in New York.

Likewise, Ted S. who described himself as a shy person, said he was willing to “let it be known that [he] wanted to work on a project.”

David demonstrated his scrappiness in the story he told of one of his first theater jobs after college, before he moved to New York. His girlfriend at the time was cast in a summer stock show in Maine. “Being shameless, I called the producer on the phone and said, do you need a pianist? I know how to play piano.” They did not need a pianist, so David lied and said he could play bass. He was hired to work there that summer and to cover the piano part for one week when the music director would be away. David thought that the job was a chance to “heal” himself from “any delusions of thinking I could be in the arts professionally.” What happened, of course, was the opposite—he ended with the feeling that music and theater was something in which he could excel. David went on to describe that the music director that summer had

recently graduated from a prestigious conservatory of music. “I thought I was gonna see a real pianist in action and go, oh, I can't do that! And instead, I came away going, I know so much more than this person about how music functions in the theater.”

One final example of this scrappiness, or willingness to hustle in order to find a job was shared by Steven when describing how he got his first gig subbing as a conductor on Broadway:

I had brought my sister to see *Once on this Island* on Broadway because she did the show in high school. And so I wanted to take her to see this production. And before we went, I cold-emailed the conductor who was Alvin Hough, Jr. And I didn't know him at the time. I just emailed him cold and said, hey, I'm gonna come see the performance tonight. I'd love to say Hi. And so we saw the show. It was great. And then, after the show—he was on stage and in costume—and so he just came down from his perch where he was conducting, and he came to say hi to me in the house. And we chatted for about 30 min, just right there in the theater while he was still in costume! And then, at the end of the conversation he said, ‘Do you want a job here?’ And I said, yes, like with a question mark. And then he said, ‘okay, I have to get it run by Stephen,’ meaning Stephen Flaherty, the composer. ‘But yeah, I think we can find, like, a position for you here.’

The right place at the right time with the right skillset

In addition to demonstrating attributes of the hustle or scrappiness, many stories were shared of the happenstance or luck of being in the right place at the right time when the opportunity was presented. Going hand in hand with this, however, is the necessity of having the requisite skills ready to go when that opportunity does come your way. For example, Zane told the story of how his father made the connection to play in the orchestra for *Hair* in 1969. At the time his father had been struggling to sustain a career as a musician and almost accepted a job working at IBM. He was invited to join other musicians for a recording session. But when he got there, he quickly realized that the band's charts (or parts) were not really ready. Zane's father, being anxious to finish up the session and get home to his family, jumped in to help finish up the parts. Two weeks later, the guy he had helped that day in the recording studio called to say, “Hey man, I'm doing this show. Would you be interested? And it was *Hair*.” So, simply because

Zane's father was willing to help out in a recording session led to his having a 4-year run on Broadway and then other shows after that.

Another example of this is found in the story that Haley shared of going in for an interview for a dance internship, but instead being offered a music internship with a Broadway bound production. Justin also shared a story of being in the right place at the time. He described that one of his first gigs in the city was playing in a band for Little Maestros, a company in New York that does "little shows for infants" and their parents. Through that job he met a guitarist who asked him to be the music director for a "little off-Broadway show" that would run for just one month. Justin thought it would be "something cool to work on and it wasn't about the money, it was for the experience." It was through that little off-Broadway production that he was able to make connections that led to his first national tour experience, his first Broadway experiences, and ultimately his current job as the music director for *The Book of Mormon*.

Many of the participants emphasized the need to have the right set of skills when that opportunity comes. For example, Ted A. explained, "if someone gives you a chance, it gives you a chance you have to deliver. I mean, that's so important, because that'll lead to other things." Alvin, used a similar line of reasoning when he explained that "once you get the opportunity, your skills better be good enough to back up, you know, what your resume says and whatnot. And, hopefully, it works for you in a positive feedback loop." Ted S., described how in his own career that "when an opportunity presented itself, I was prepared to take it." Even the story shared in the narrative (see chapter 1) described an instance me being able to demonstrate the right set of skills in an audition which led to a national tour. Haley added that, even after the opportunity comes you need to keep working on your skills "so that once you're in the room, you're not letting anybody down."

John described how his experience working with the City Center Encores gave him the right set of skills to work with the Broadway Center Stage series at Kennedy Center in Washington DC—a connection that then led to his first show as a music director on Broadway. Cynthia, in a similar line of thought explained that one big reason she was able to get her first job as a music director for a Broadway show was because she had the right skills when the opportunity came up:

The pianist conductor needed to be able to play *Rhapsody in Blue*, *Concerto in F*, the *Piano Preludes*, and then all the popular Gershwin songs. There were no musical theater people at that time who could play freaking *Rhapsody in Blue* and *Concerto in F*. There just weren't, you know?

Unfortunately, there were also examples shared of individuals who did not have the skills ready when the opportunity came. For example, Alvin explained that he was given the opportunity to audition for his first national tour when the original keyboardist was fired in the rehearsal process. “I got my break because of someone else's failure,” Alvin said. “Okay, great for me. Sucks for that guy.” Zane, to repeat a previously shared quote, bluntly stated that “unfortunately, once you muck up on a big level, you’re really not gonna get a second chance.”

The Importance of Piano Skills

As was mentioned at the top of this chapter, being proficient as a pianist seems to be a prerequisite skill for work as a music director. In fact, as was explained in the literature review, Church (2015), Engel (1973), Fox (2015), Kasdorf (2020), Laster (2001), and Marshall (2019) all shared examples of music directors who started their careers as pianists. Based on what was learned from the interviews and focus group discussions for this dissertation study, this one skill seems to be the most important skill needed in order to gain entry into the field of music direction.

Ted A. explained some reasons behind the importance of piano playing ability:

I can't even think of a show where it's a non-piano playing conductor... because as a music director who's a pianist you're playing rehearsals. You're playing a run through in the rehearsal room... Let's say you have vocal notes to give to a principal. You know when you're doing that you're probably in the theater. I have a little keyboard here [moves camera angle to show a keyboard in his dressing room at the theater]. So you're sitting there in the room and playing through it, giving vocal notes.

Justin described a similar situation himself, as an argument for having piano skills:

The piano is integral. Even if the music director does not play an instrument during the show, I think in order to teach the music to a cast member or to demonstrate what they need. I think they need to have that instrument as part of their own set of skills. Especially if you're maintaining, if you're working with the vocalist, I think it's important, especially on the show, it's important that you should be able to play the show whilst working with the actor.

Finally, just to hammer this point home, Cynthia explained:

If you don't play the piano, you're at the mercy of having a rehearsal pianist with you. And one thing I find hard about that is if you don't play yourself like you might have a great idea in your head of how to add 15 more seconds to the scene change, but then, you can't execute it yourself. You've got to somehow get what's in your brain out to someone else. And things just move really fast in musical theater when you're putting a show up.

John explained how a show's budget is another reason for piano skills. He explained that he does know of "wonderful, fabulous conductors who are not pianists by trade" but it is difficult for them to "get into that stream... because if you have a conductor who is not a pianist on salary... then you need to put another pianist on salary." John continued the thought by explaining:

There's a real path now from pianist to conductor, and a lot of that has to do with familiarity with the show. Because if you're a pianist, you're playing rehearsals, and you're involved in building the show. And so you really know the intricacies of everything. So then, that makes sense, you know that you would then be in the conducting stream.

David described a few “excellent music directors who did not start with great keyboard skills but have *developed* very good keyboard skills” (emphasis added) because of the necessity to have that skill in order to have a career as a music director on Broadway.

Numerous examples were shared of working as rehearsal pianists or audition pianists. These positions on the music team provide an entryway into the profession and can help put someone on the path to becoming a music director. For example, David explained that “if you’re a pianist, if you start out as a rehearsal pianist, you’re in the room” and thus you are on the “natural path” towards work as a music director. Ted S. explained that his piano skills gave him opportunities early in his career. “The fact that I was a good sight-reader on the piano—could play auditions well—and actually knew the literature was important.” Joe claims that piano skills “in 2023, absolutely the most important thing! You can entirely make a career based on your piano chops if you have any skills with singers at all.”

Paul Gemignani - The Exception?

While discussing the importance of piano skills, one name came up multiple times in the interviews as a potential exception to this rule. And in the eyes of at least one participant, evidence that piano skills, while important, are not necessary. That name is Paul Gemignani, the veteran music director best known for his work on most of Stephen Sondheim’s Broadway productions. Paul Gemignani is famously known as a music director who is not a pianist. He is a percussionist. His first Broadway gig was playing percussion for Sondheim’s *Follies*. He was eventually promoted to music director for that same production. Gemignani then went on to work as the music director for nearly 40 Broadway productions. In his work as a music director, Joe explained, “Paul Gemignani didn’t play the piano, he carried someone along with him” as a

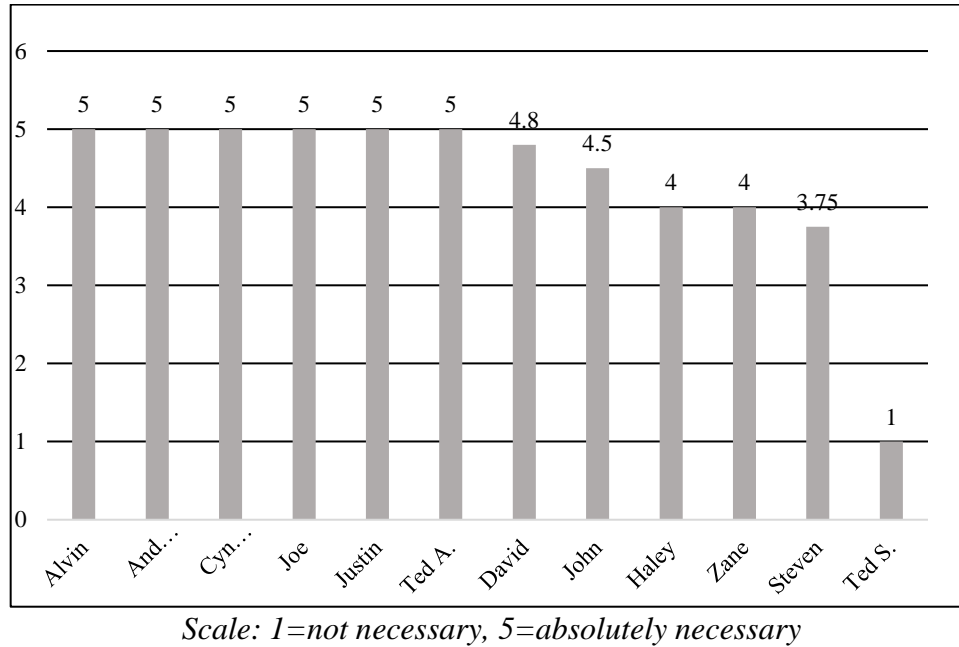
rehearsal pianist. Cynthia declared, “I don't know anyone other than Paul Gemignani doing it. [laughs]” The outlier response came from Ted S., who explained:

My first experience on Broadway in a serious, long-term way was with Paul Gemignani as music director, and he had no piano skills. And he was the best. So, I saw it work first hand that you can have wonderful pianists in rehearsal and the music director never has to touch the keyboard.

This discussion of the career of Paul Gemignani was the result of participant’s answers to the question, “on a scale of one to five with one being not necessary and five being absolutely necessary, how would you rank the importance of piano/keyboard skills for a Broadway music director?” David, in response to this question explained, “I'm gonna say, 4.8. And that point 2 is Paul Gemignani.” John reasoned that perhaps Gemignani was able to have such a successful career as a music director without piano skills is because “that was a different time” which “made that crossover possible” but, he explained, in the current Broadway climate, “the economics of it are now much harder to do.” Alvin lamented the fact that his answer was five. He explained that he “wished it were 2” because he felt that non-pianists who are excellent musicians could probably be successful as conductors on Broadway.

The responses from each participant to this question rating the importance of piano skills can be seen in Figure 4 below. Of the twelve interview participants, six indicated that piano skills are absolutely necessary (a five on the scale), the next five participants landed between 3.75 and 4.8. The outlier, Ted S., responded with a one.

Figure 4: Rating the Importance of Piano Skills for a Broadway Music Director



Taking all twelve responses into account, the average score on the scale is 4.3375. This would suggest that piano skills are an important characteristic for an aspiring music director. Being competent at the piano can open doors to the career that might otherwise be closed. Ted S.—the outlier response—even admitted that, while he does believe that piano skills aren’t necessarily required, “I’m glad that I have piano skills. It opens up other avenues.”

Several participants cautioned, however, that seeking an entry into the field as an audition pianist is not for everyone—even if they do have great piano skills. Justin brought up this subject by explaining that his husband (who also happens to be a music director) is “an amazing sight reader... that’s why he can play auditions and he is comfortable.” Justin went on to say,

I still don’t quite feel comfortable, and people laugh at that now... they’re like, ‘oh god! Are you kidding? You just read that.’ And I’m [argh-like frustrated sound]... But my way in was through my ear.

This topic also came up in a focus group discussion. Ted S. explained,

I would just say, also, there are people who are great pianists, who are wonderful sight readers who know the whole literature, and they're very well set up to enter this field through the audition piano route. But not everybody is that person.

He went on to say, “I wouldn't advise somebody to go and be an audition pianist who can't do it well, who's incredibly nervous or not a great sight reader, can't transpose, or can't decipher bad handwriting [laughter], or doesn't know the literature.” Haley chimed in to say,

I know for a fact that I should never be an audition pianist. I would rather jump out a window than be an audition pianist. [Laughter] Just because that's not where my skill set is, you know? Like I can play, but I'm not a ‘put anything in front of me and have me play it perfectly right away’ type, person. And I think that part of my journey too, has been learning what are my strengths, what are my weaknesses... also being honest about where my own skill sets lie and open to still trying to grow and improve the things that I want to work on, but not putting myself in positions where I'm going to then let people down because I'm not able to be what they need in that position.

Subbing in a Broadway Orchestra Pit

Another way in which piano skills can help an individual gain entry into the field is by working as a sub pianist/keyboard player for Broadway shows. Numerous examples of this were shared across the interviews and focus groups. David told the story of how John Kander (composer of *Cabaret* and *Chicago*) got his break into the business by subbing on piano for *West Side Story*—which led to an introduction to Jerome Robbins (choreographer of numerous Broadway shows) and ultimately a long-term career as a Broadway composer.

Steven shared how own experiences working as a sub for more than one Broadway show. Joe shared the story of Julie McBride (currently music director of *Mulan Rouge*) who got her start as an intern working with Joe (demonstrating her scrappiness in the process). “On the second day she said, you know I have to be really honest with you. The reason I wanted to be your intern is so that I could watch in the pit and sub eventually.” When Joe had the chance to see her perform a recital as a student at Mannes College of Music he was “slack jawed” because

“she aced every single piece on the program and I said, Okay, you can sub.” He went on to explain that “she just skyrocketed from there.”

Other participants described their own experiences working as subs in Broadway orchestras. This job is not for the faint of heart. Steven explained that, unlike the actors who are given rehearsal time before they have to go on as an understudy or swing, musicians who come in to sub are not given rehearsal time with the orchestra. They have to be able to sit down and play their part. In fact, Steven explained that when he tells actors that “subs don't get rehearsals and have to learn everything on their own. They almost lose their minds, because if they go on for a track that they've never performed before they go crazy.”

Alvin, in a focus group, also talked about the difficulty of subbing:

Subbing on a show is so hard. Everything is stacked against you. You don't get a rehearsal with the other band [members]. You may not get a chance to figure out what the mix is in your headphones. There are so many things that can go against you. You're in a pit with strangers, likely for your first time. And you're trying to put on a good show. You try to impress the people around you. Let's not mix words here.

Ted A., whose first Broadway work was subbing on keyboards at *Wicked* described the difference between subbing and being a regular player.

Subbing on a Broadway show is like the next level from wanting to make it. And then from subbing it's holding a chair. Meaning you're there every night, and that is like you're dug in. You've got a consistent job, hopefully, on this show. And for me that came with *The Prom*.

Joe also talked about the climb from subbing to other Broadway jobs. “I started subbing on Broadway and getting Broadway jobs. And then, bit by bit, I sort of worked my way up the ladder.” Even now Joe, who hasn't worked as a music director in recent years (he's more interested in composing and arranging now), explained that he still subs occasionally. “I haven't done much Broadway in the last few years. I sub a lot on *Book of Mormon* as a keyboard player, but I haven't been doing much Broadway as an MD.”

The Music Assistant

Beyond piano skills, another entryway into working as a music director is demonstrated by Haley's story. She started her Broadway career as a music assistant and held various assistant roles for a number of years before being offered a position as a music director. Haley explained, in a focus group discussion, that she believes there are two potential gateways: using your piano skills to gain entry, or what she did: "which is more of the music assistant/music associate" and "working your way up that way through the team. So it's a little bit less playing-oriented. But it's a little bit more like being part of the music team from the ground level on a show." Haley, was quick to explain however, that she believes there is much overlap between piano skills and being an assistant. "I also would say that I don't think the two are necessarily mutually exclusive. I just think that they're two variations on the same thing."

The question is then, what does a music assistant do? What does that job look like? Haley also provided an answer to those questions. "I would say, over the last 10 years, that position of music assistant has very much evolved and changed in terms of what the expectations of someone in that position are." Often the work involves using Finale to notate changes in the score during the rehearsal process, create key changes in the score, or even sit at the piano in rehearsals when needed. She explained that, "Now the expectations of people in those roles in the room are that they are very fluent in a multitude of different softwares and things that really go beyond what you would consider to be an entry level position for a job." Software applications that were mentioned include Finale music notation, Ableton (a Digital Audio Workstation or DAW—often used for click tracks), and MainStage (a music application for Apple computers that is used in live performance situations). Haley concluded her explanation of the

assistant track by describing how she has enjoyed working in various roles within the music department:

I think as I've progressed in my career, I've realized that having worn all of those hats is so useful. And I really enjoy the fact that I still do different jobs... And I think that each of those jobs sort of informs the other and gives you a different perspective to bring to the table. It's taken a lot of years for me to realize that, oh, I think that that's actually a really great and important thing. And I think that if you want to do multiple jobs within this world. You absolutely should. And I think for a long time I was sort of afraid of the feedback of like. 'No, you have to choose one thing.' and I'm starting to learn that I think that's absolutely not the case.

Alvin explained that he “can’t imagine doing a show without an assistant because of the rapid-fire nature” of what is required of the music team, especially during the rehearsal process. Ted S., explained that the years he spent working in assistant roles gave him “the opportunity to watch more experienced people in charge and learn from observation rather than being plunged into being the music director too early.”

Say Yes to Everything (Early Career)

A final piece of advice that comes from the interviews, related to this entryway into a Broadway career is the importance of saying yes to opportunities that come your way. Alvin explained his approach when he first came to New York as, “my answer to everything: yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. Could you? Yes, yes, yes, yes.” This was his way of building the network he wanted to have in the city. Ted A. explained, “I tell people that are wanting to have a career in this industry, if you can afford it financially, taking as many opportunities to play in front of people is the best thing that you can do.” Justin Mendoza offered similar advice, “I often tell young music directors to say yes to everything. Or, at the very least, say yes to as much as you can. To learn from... and if you don't feel inspired by it you can say no. But you know, I think it's important to say yes.” Finally, John described this mindset as being open to “all kinds of

things and all kinds of experiences because that's only going to broaden the well that you draw from to make music and art.”

In describing the various gateways for entry into a Broadway career the importance concepts that emerged included, having the right skills ready to go when an opportunity presents itself, the fact that piano skills are most likely going to be required of someone on the path to becoming a music director, an alternative route could be attained through working as a music assistant—which necessitates a familiarity with the technology used by Broadway music teams, and finally that it is important to say yes to projects that come your way—especially early in a career.

6.3 Learning How to Do It

*No one really knows how the game is played
The art of the trade
How the sausage gets made
We just assume that it happens
But no one else is in the room where it happens.
(from Hamilton by Lin Manuel Miranda)*

Observation/Being in the Room

The initial impulse for dissertation project stems from a curiosity to seek an answer to the question, “how do Broadway music directors learn how to do the job?” A sub-question further asks, “What role does active participation within a ‘community of practice’ (Wenger, 1998) play in the development of the skillset? Across the interviews an important answer to this question seems to emerge which is, simply stated, much of the job is learned by being in the room—meaning the rehearsal room—where you have the chance to observe others doing the job. Multiple participants talked about the importance of getting into that room, if only to observe the process. David explained, “if you're not in the room, you don't meet those people” and ultimately “it's more about seeing how the sausage is made.” The following examples all support the idea

that also emerged from the literature review when Church (2015) explained that, “in music direction you learn best by doing” (p. 121).

Alvin explained that “I think there's so much to be gained by access. Being in the room as a music assistant, as a PA [production assistant] on the stage management team. As a fly on the wall. Low on the totem pole. There's value in that. To just watch and observe and hopefully gain something.” Andrea added,

The experience of being in the room, sensing the energies, seeing how it all adds up cannot be replicated. And what you get to know when you're in a rehearsal room is the flow of how people work, what they're all doing. There's so many different kinds of work happening at the same time. And we're all working in tandem. So until you really experience that you can't put it into context.

Ted A. explains that when someone asks him about the value of an academic program in music direction, he replies,

That's great. But honestly, moving to New York City is probably better education because you're in it. You're experiencing what it's like to do the actual job. I mean, we should have apprenticeships because you learn a lot about energy in the room and dynamics and how to work with a choreographer, how to work with a director, and problems that come up in the music department, and how to troubleshoot those. And, you know... You can't prepare for this in a vacuum, I think, because there are so many things that come up in personalities and things that you learn that I'm sure they don't teach you in school.

Ted S. shared the experience of being in the room with Paul Gemignani and Stephen Sondheim during rehearsals for *Sunday in the Park with George* as an invaluable learning experience. He explained that Paul Gemignani,

Would pull me aside on occasion and whisper advice. Or, point things out that he had just done, and said, ‘notice how I did that?’ And the same thing with Sondheim, he also helped me get that job, and knew I was in it to learn. And so he also would sometimes pull me aside and say, ‘don't do that’ or, ‘see what Paul just did? That's what I like about him.’ So those were very important mentors.

Haley summed up the experience of being in the room:

I think, for me, spending a lot of years as a music assistant was probably the best possible learning opportunity, because I was in the room and involved in everything, but I was also able to observe a lot of different music directors who were the best folks doing the job at the time... having the opportunity to be in the room and absorb all that I think was equally important.

Another benefit of being in the room is the ability to determine what you like or dislike about someone's process as you observe them working. This type of observation might inform the choices a person makes later on when they become a music director themselves. This idea of noticing what you like or dislike was mentioned by multiple participants.

Haley, for example, explained that this type of observation has shaped her approach to music direction.

"I got to watch so many people who I admired and respected lead rooms. And I learned so much primarily about how I wanted to lead a room, but also in some cases, what I didn't want to do... and how not to treat other people."

Haley further explained that she has spent time in rooms that were "wonderful and collaborative" as well as rooms that were "really problematic in a lot of ways... particularly from a mental health perspective." So, she has made the decision to ensure that the rooms where she is in charge are "a supportive and positive environment to work in because life is too short to be in those other rooms."

Zane also talked about picking and choosing those things he liked (or didn't like) when observing music directors he worked with:

I never took any conducting classes in school. I never graduated college. But I sat under Daryl Waters twice. And I'm like, oh, he did this little prep thing. Okay, I'm gonna steal that. Or, something as simple as I'm just gonna pulse the time before we start [shows tapping his fingers together]. So, you get an idea where it's gonna be. There's no clicks or nothing that we're gonna... today it's gonna be here. You look at the drummer and you get the head. Now you go and boom [shows upbeat/downbeat motion with his hands] and we're in. So little things like that, you see.

Alvin explained that when you observe something you like, you need to put that “in the back of your head. And you kind of say, okay, here's what I like, what I don't like. And you just learn by watching and just by being in the setting.” One example of something he has put in the back of his head is the importance of being open to “constructive criticism” because he saw first-hand how being closed off to that type of criticism can ultimately lead to an unsuccessful show.

Learning from Mentors

Every Broadway music director interviewed for this study shared examples of mentors who helped them along the way. These mentors were often the people that they were able to observe “in the room” as they were working their way up the ladder. Ted A. explained that “you're learning a lot, as you go, from mentors just how we do it. It is an apprenticeship program.” John also described the learning process as an apprenticeship:

I would say it's like a craft. It's akin to carving wood or something, you know? So I also think that apprenticeship/mentorship... I think you learn in those ways, too. Then when it's your turn to do, you know, you're bringing that to it. But I don't think it's the sort of thing that you can kind of just study in a purely academic way.

Other participants described mentors, outside of music directors, who were influential in their learning process. Joe, for example, gave credit to his teacher Paul Vermel at the University of Illinois who taught him how to conduct opera. “I learned that if you can conduct Puccini, you can conduct anything.” Joe explained that Vermel, “knew I wanted to do theater. He knew I wanted to do straight music, but he said, ‘let’s do Puccini, because that’s just going to give you the chops.’ And he worked the hell out of me, I mean it’s really hard.”

Justin credits Alex Lacamoire as the mentor who took a chance on him and helped him start working on Broadway. He described how Alex, after being given Justin’s name as someone to consider for the first national tour of *In the Heights*, gave Justin two pieces from the show to work on. Two weeks later they then met up and Alex essentially gave Justin a lesson on how to

play those two pieces. Alex then asked Justin to take an additional piece of music, work on it, and return in a few weeks. This continued for four sessions. Justin explains:

So finally, after our fourth work session, he said, you know I didn't really realize how green you are. But I really appreciate how hard you've worked and I think that's why you might be the right person for this job. And I was like, Oh, my god! And then the panic started. I'm like, Oh, my god, no! I'm not the right person for this job! What are you thinking? And he said, 'okay, so the tour goes out in October.' And it was May. He's like, 'so you have a lot of time to learn this show, and I'll help you.' He was like, 'I will not let you fail.'

Justin went on to work as music director for that national tour and the connections he made there led to additional work upon his return to New York.

Steven described a mentor he worked with during his college years who was influential in the way he thinks about music direction. That mentor, Jonathan Goldberg, helped Steven think about the “why of a piece rather than how it feels in the moment” and to take into consideration “why the writers wrote it in a certain way.” Steven credits that learning as helping him to get on the path of a music director, as opposed to “purely being a musical theater actor.”

Another type of mentor-like influence was mentioned in several of the interviews: the motivating power of having a role-model. Zane, for example, spoke highly of his father as a role model for learning how to be a professional musician and maintain a career:

He was one of those good musicians that practiced every day. And he was a woodwind player, so he had to practice a whole bunch of different instruments every day, and he was really proficient on all of his instruments.

Zane also spoke of the value of seeing his father's career as positive reinforcement for the idea that it was possible to become a professional musician:

A lot of my friends' parents only thought of music as a hobby. You couldn't support yourself this way. And my father was actually doing it and supporting his three sons and his wife, you know? So, we had living proof that it was possible. Now, to hear my father tell it, there was some rough times up and through there, but he made it happen.

Justin and John both spoke of the influence they felt from seeing ambitious, young people in New York City striving for their dreams. For example, Justin explained, “As I met other young artists who had these bold dreams and ambitions. I think I was like, oh yeah! I kind of want to do that, too.”

Learning from Experience

Another important aspect of being in the room is the chance an aspiring music director has to experience learning the job by actually doing the various parts of the job. Alvin explained,

A lot of times like experience is found just by doing it... There's only so much you can learn at a class... you'll learn by messing things up in real time. And then hopefully, having someone say, no, you should do it this way.

Andrea, in a focus group discussion explained the importance of experiential learning, because “the way you’ve learned it was by doing it. And there’s only so much time that you have before it’s time to do stuff.” Andrea learned this lesson the hard way when working on *The Band’s Visit* because of the difficulty they had managing subs on that show. Looking back on the experience, she is grateful for the opportunity and the lessons learned. “I know if this ever comes up again, I can start from the beginning saying, this is what it’s gonna be like, and this is what we have to do. And then I can set it up better for players in the future.”

Haley summed up the importance of gaining experience:

There is no one direct path, and any sort of life experience is going to make you a stronger person in your job. I think that there is certainly something to be said for the elements of training that are very skill specific in terms of playing piano, or learning to use Finale, or Ableton, or any of the various softwares that we use. And I’m not discounting the importance of those in any way, because they are all crucial to being successful at the job. But I also think the job is so much bigger and so much more holistic than that. And so, your experience, being in the room in any capacity, your experience dealing with people in any capacity, basically just like being a human, like all of that is relevant experience to draw from. Because, at the end of the day as a music director, yes, your job is focused on the music, but it's also more than anything focused on working with a variety of people in the room.

Cynthia shared the story her first orchestra rehearsal—something she wished she had experienced beforehand, but hadn't. That experience came with her first Broadway show as a music director:

I woulda much rather have had some experience leading an ensemble, teaching music to a chorus, vocal coaching one on one, leading a band rehearsal, conducting, conducting from the piano, conducting with a stick. And honestly, even like logistics, like how to create a friggin spreadsheet to keep track of who's in what number.

The importance of learning from experience is supported by information uncovered in the literature. For example, Engel (1973) explained that, "some of this can be taught; much of it, however emerges only through observation and experience." Likewise, Morley (2011) explained:

If you aspire to be a full-time professional musical director I would strongly advise you to take on as many different and diverse jobs as possible--basically, do anything and everything you possibly can! This is especially important in the early stages of your career, as there is no substitute for experience. (p. 163)

Deliberate Practice

In addition to the learning that can occur from the observation and experience that is only possible by "being in the room," many of the participants described efforts they made on their own which might be classified as deliberate practice, or at least deliberate efforts to improve in the skills needed as a music director. As explained by Ericsson, Krampe and Tesch-Romer (1993), "The goal of deliberate practice is not 'doing more of the same.' Rather, it involves engaging with full concentration in a special activity to improve one's performance" (p. 390).

Haley, for example, explained that she "abandoned" piano lessons when she was young "in favor of learning other instruments." As a music director, "you don't have to be the best piano player in the world" she explained, "if you have other skillsets that you bring to the table." Even so, she recognizes the importance of piano skills and has therefore taken piano lessons as an adult because she knows it will benefit her work as a music director:

I realize that it's actually incredibly helpful to do as a grown up because you're able to use that time to focus on the actual skills that you want to be focusing on as opposed to, going in and having someone present you with a bunch of classical pieces to learn. It's like, no, let's take a look at this song that I actually need to be able to play and look at these excerpts that are tricky, and figure out the mechanics of how to get them in your fingers more easily. So that has been a huge help.

I think, also, just being honest with myself about where I am and what my skill set is in learning to lean into what I enjoy about playing the piano. Because when you think about taking piano lessons as a kid, a lot of it is either fear based or not enjoyable because you're not playing content that you enjoy. It just has a very sort of regimented and rigid association. I think a lot of my work as an adult has been learning that I actually enjoy playing piano, and that it actually can be fun, and that I don't need to be the best at it for it to be enjoyable.

John explained that he has continued working on his “stick conducting” skills. Although he doesn't take weekly lessons, he does seek out opportunities to be coached. “I still get coaching from someone when I have something big coming up. Or, I just wanna try a few things before an orchestra rehearsal. I have someone that I work with who I'll get [them] a ticket to a show or a concert or something.” He then asks that person to “rip me apart after. Just watch me and tell me what I'm doing weird and what habits I've developed.” He feels that seeking out this type of coaching is similar to what singers do when they have the occasional voice lesson to “get tuned up. It's just like that. It's just like playing an instrument or singing.”

Offering advice to aspiring music directors, John encourages them to take a deliberate approach in developing the necessary skills. “Look at where you are and look at where you want to get and look at the people who are there and what skills do they have that you don't have. And then, you've got to develop them.” Cynthia was, perhaps, a more direct in describing her own efforts in that regard:

I remember very clearly feeling, okay, even though I don't have that skill. I've got the skills to get to that skill. I know that's really possible for me. And I felt, at the time, like it was possible to get there quickly. I felt like a good enough musician that... just tell me, give me the knowledge. And I'm gonna implement this sh** really fast.

Joe described the humiliating experience of being fired from a job, early in his career “for not playing well enough.” An experience that led him to work on his piano skills:

They were doing *Camelot* and a couple of other big scores and I was playing from the piano conductor score. And I should have practiced. You know what those things look like. They're big thick books and things [are] in frickin G-flat. And it's all over the map. And I just, I kind of crashed and burned at the piano that day and got a call that night from the head music guy saying, ‘I'm not sure you're quite ready for this gig.’ And they were nice about it. But I have to say I went back, and I hit the keyboard a little bit harder.

One way Joe “hit the keyboard a little bit harder” was by working on his skills playing pop and rock styles, something that has served him well in his career. “I was getting to be all the time a better faker at the piano and I could groove at the piano.” He noted in the interview that he hadn’t ever thought about the fact that he was fired from that early job because of his lack of piano and yet it was his piano skills—specifically as a pop/rock player—that landed him the job as music director for the original production of *The Who’s Tommy* when it first came to Broadway in the 1990s. “When *Tommy* came around, the director heard me play “Pinball Wizard” and said, you’ve got the job. So ironically the piano got me back in after it got me thrown out.”

Learning the Repertoire and Styles of the Musical Theater Canon

Another way that the participants demonstrated an effort to improve their skill set is found in the descriptions of how they became familiar with the repertoire of musical theater. For example, Ted S. explained that once he knew he was interested in a career in musical theater, he spent time studying the repertoire.

I spent a lot of time reading and listening to shows... I read encyclopedias of musical theater from cover to cover. I listened to many show albums. I studied the printed scores which are almost never full scores. But, the Sondheim shows, in particular, had a lot of detail indicated. So I understood the history of musical theater. How this form developed over time built on its predecessors. I even could connect it to operetta and opera, oratorio... I had a sense of what dramatic theater music came from... I think I was like a sponge when I was starting out—and maybe still now—trying to absorb lessons from smart people all around me and trying to surround myself with people I could learn from.

Justin described a similar approach in that he went to the library and tried to get his hands on albums and other materials and he spent time at the piano figuring out how to play the music by ear. Steven described himself as an avid consumer of media:

I consume a lot of media, whether it's music, or shows, or movies, or things like that. And I think that sort of helps my brain understand different types of communicating different styles of storytelling. And it just keeps me current with things so that I'm always ready and knowledgeable about things.

Joe, described how he became familiar with the repertoire by playing auditions. “I played a lot of auditions and I knew the Pop repertoire really well. So, singers would come in and name a tune, and I could play.” John noted that popular music styles have always been a part of the art form. Thus, he believes that it is important to be exposed to those styles. “I think just the more that you're this sponge, soaking up music wherever you can find it” is important, “because it's just so likely that there's going to be a song like that in a show someday that you might want to work on.”

Alvin credits his years working at a summer camp playing shows with exposing him to the diverse repertoire and styles of musical theater:

I did that summer camp for seven years. I mean we did *Barnum*, *Chess*, *Annie*, *Grease*, *Joseph [and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat]*. Crazy different shows... And that kept me interested. It could be R&B, it could be hip hop, it could be rock, it could be country... It could be whatever. And I'm like, wow, that's kind of cool.

Alvin went on to explain that he really enjoyed working with diverse musical styles as the music director for the recently closed Broadway show, *New York, New York*. “I thought it was a fantastic show. It was a lot of fun to do. The music was everywhere. Went from Afro-Cuban to very orchestral and classical.”

Cynthia and Joe both talked about feeling a difference in terms of playing the piano in multiple styles versus being able to conduct or be the music director for shows with various

styles. Cynthia explained that she feels “pretty confident” in “many different styles as a music director.” But as a pianist, she explains,

If I had to play the book of *Sophisticated Ladies* in a highly improvisatory jazz fashion. That's not gonna be my thing. Could I conduct it? And could I speak that language to some extent to an orchestra, yes. Although, then we get into some cultural issues that I think I'm not the right cultural fit for that particular show, regardless of whether I think I could do it at this point.

College and University Training

While the bulk of the information covered in the interviews pointed to the importance of hands-on, experiential learning, many of the participants also spoke of gaining valuable experience from their college or university training. Table 20 provides a listing of each participant along with their undergraduate area of study. Most of the participants studied music or musical theater. There are a few outliers though, as can be seen in the table. Three studied subjects outside of music and theater and one participant, Zane, started to work professionally in music and theater right after high school.

Table 20: Participants' College/University Areas of Study

Name	Major/Area of Study
Cynthia	Music (classical piano performance)
Joe	Music (Bachelor of Arts)
Ted S.	Music (Bachelor of Arts)
Andrea	Music (with Minor in Theater)
Ted	Music/Journalism (double major)
John	Musical Theater Performance
Steven	Musical Theater Performance
Justin	Musical Theater/Film Studies
Alvin	Meteorology
David	Biology
Haley	Psychology
Zane	Did not attend college

A fascinating insight was shared by Haley as she described how her degree in Psychology has given her skills that help her work as a music director, especially when it comes to understanding how to work with and treat other people.

Having my degree in psychology is definitely helpful, because I think I've spent a lot of time studying and thinking about these things in a way that I probably wouldn't have if I had been in a strict, like, music performance or even music direction program.

Steven, John, and Justin all spoke of studying musical theater performance before transitioning to work as music directors. That experience helps them better understand how to work with an actor and understand the actor's point of view. Steven explained how this training helps him to translate the language of music into terms that other people working on a show can understand. For example, the music theory training he received in his musical theater program was fairly elementary to him because he had received so much classical piano training while growing up. This experience—seeing how musical theater actors are taught music—means that he understands how to translate the language of music into terms that other individuals working in

musical theater can understand. He explained, “I have a perspective of how to work with people who don't really understand music” and that, he explained,

Has helped me in working with other people. A lot of directors, choreographers, even composers don't know much about written music. So, it's sort of our job to help maintain that and do a little translation for everybody.

Justin described how his own experience with vocal damage helps him empathize with actors. “I had a lot of trauma for the first couple years after college because of that. And I can still access that. And I understand when actors are freaking out about their voice.” So, he knows that he should not be the type of manager that says, “Well tough, you have to do it this way” because he knows that will only make things worse.

Based on the information gleaned from the interviews and focus group discussions it is apparent that, while there is no one guaranteed or direct path to becoming a music director, there is much to be said about the importance of gaining real-world hands-on experience. Across the interviews and discussion groups the idea that the best learning for this type of work comes from being in the room, gaining hands-on experience with the various facets of the job. That experiential learning can be combined with other types learning such as, becoming familiar with the repertoire and styles of musical theater, taking lessons from mentors, and even studying music or theater at the university level. Haley may have summed this up the best when she said, “There is no one direct path, and any sort of life experience is going to make you a stronger person in your job.”

6.4 The Path to Broadway

*Come on and ease on down, ease on down the road
Come on, ease on down, ease on down the road
Don't you carry nothing that might be a load
Come on, ease on down, ease on down the road
(from The Wiz by Charlie Smalls)*

Climbing the Ladder

As a person is developing the necessary skills to work as a music director on Broadway, chances are that they worked their way up through the ranks before they attained that position. This could mean working as a music director outside of Broadway such as with school productions (elementary school through college), Community Theater, regional theater, national tours, off-Broadway, and so on. This idea was also seen in the literature review. Engel (1973) and Loud (2022) both shared examples of individuals working their way up through the industry. Likewise, the participants shared numerous examples of this concept. Ted S., for example, explains that “there is a ladder to climb” which possibly,

Starts with student productions or amateur productions or cabarets and auditions. And then subbing or working on a tour or working in the regionals and meeting people, and then eventually something on Broadway.

Joe Church agrees. He explained that to get into Broadway work,

You get a piano playing job—again, piano playing is so important. If you’re a really good player, get a rehearsal piano job, get a music assistant job and just sorta notch your way up in that commercial scene.

Across the interviews numerous examples of the various potential stops along the way to Broadway were shared.

Andrea, for example, talked of gaining experience conducting shows in college and with a summer stock company. Ted S., likewise, spoke of his college experience learning how to be a music director without the supervision of teachers.

My job training was on the job. It was in college to start. I had nobody supervising me there. I organized the shows mostly with Vicki [Victoria Clark], but sometimes with other people. We produced it with another student and cast it, and rehearsed it and staged it all on our own. So we were learning by doing, absolutely. And there was no teacher involved in any of those.

Justin shared that he got some early experience working as a music director in college as well when a fellow theater student asked him to music direct that student’s senior project, a production of *The Fantastics*. Justin explained that,

When he gave me the score, I was like, I can't do this! I can't read this! I'm not a pianist like this, you know? But I worked and I listened to that CD and I kind of connected the dots, and I was able to make my way through it. And I became a better reader that semester because I was working on this extremely hard score.

In the literature review, Morgan (2018) is cited as writing that, “almost every professional in the performing arts got his or her first taste of show business through school or community productions” (p. 37). As is shown in Table 21 below, support for this statement was exhibited through various examples of early theater experiences which were shared.

Table 21: Examples of Early Experiences with Musical Theater

Name	Early Theater Experience
John (as a child)	Professional singer
Haley (age 10)	Ensemble part in regional production
Alvin (age 13)	Associate Music Director for a summer camp
Andrea (age 14)	Assistant music director at summer camp
Ted (middle school)	Middle School/High School productions
Zane (middle school)	<i>Hair</i> on Broadway (in the pit with his father)
Justin (Teenager)	Teen theater company in San Francisco
David (high school)	High School Production
Joe (high school)	Music director for H.S. production
Cynthia (college)	Keyboards for summer stock shows

Several participants also talked about working as a music director for regional theaters. Joe put it this way, “I did so many dinner theaters and stock theaters and regional theaters, and all this kind of stuff along the way.” Ted S. explained that he was fortunate to be in a position that allowed him to travel outside of New York to work at regional theaters:

I was single and didn’t have any responsibilities at home. So, it was easy for me to travel and do a show at La Jolla [a regional theater in San Diego] for three months, or Texas, or Boston. So, I did quite a lot of work in the regional theaters. Often these projects were just built for those theaters, but sometimes they had the potential to continue.

Another frequent stepping stone on the path to Broadway that came up in the interviews was experience working on national tours. Alvin described working on national tours of *Dream Girls* and *Memphis* before being called back to New York to work on *Scandalous* on Broadway. He had previously played for the workshop production in New York and they called him back when it transferred to Broadway. Justin worked on national tours of *In the Heights* and *Wicked*. Joe shared the experience of working on the national tour of *Little Shop of Horrors* (he also worked on the New York production of that show prior to the tour). Even Cynthia explained that while on sabbatical from her current position as a professor of musical theater she was able to work on the national tour of *Come From Away*.

Not every steppingstone is outside of New York. Frequently the participants mentioned work on off-Broadway productions in New York City. An off-Broadway production is defined as a professional production in a theater that has fewer than 500 seats in the audience. For example, Andrea’s first Broadway show, *The Band’s Visit*, was a musical that transferred to Broadway and brought her along, giving her that first Broadway credit as a music director. Similarly, Zane’s first Broadway show for which he was the music director, *Bring in 'da Noise, Bring in 'da Funk*, started at the Public Theater, a famous off-Broadway venue. (Incidentally, Andrea’s upcoming show, *Suffs* also got its start at the Public). David Chase described getting his foot into the theater

scene playing piano for the long-running musical parody, *Forbidden Broadway*, both in Boston and in New York—where it played off-Broadway.

Connections/Networking

As the participants described their career journeys, another nearly universally important concept was revealed: the importance of building and maintaining a network of connections within the theater world. In some ways, participants described that the connections you have, the people you know, might be more important than your actual skills as a musician. Ted A., for example, explained that “obviously, you need to be able to play. But I think the connection is the most important.” Justin, likewise declared:

The unfair thing about this business... It's not like I'm the only person who can do what I do, you know? Especially here in New York. Everyone is talented. Everyone has their own unique set of skills... But I happen to have the connections that I had to get me where I am, you know? I also, of course, have my own sets of skills and talents. I think it's a perfect little recipe of both.

John explained that he thinks of Broadway as “a business of connectivity.” So, he explained, “I think you just have to be—not in an annoying way—out and on the scene and finding out what's going on and who's doing what.” This fits nicely with how Haley explained that “in order to get into the room, it's about maintaining relationships with the other folks who are creating these new rooms.” This idea of making connections also seems to be very important for maintaining a career on Broadway. This is particularly important when establishing working relationships with others (directors, choreographers, composers, etc.) so that they will want to work with you again (more on this topic in chapter 7).

You Never Know Who's Watching You

Hand in hand with the importance of connections, numerous mentions were made of the idea that, especially early on in a career, it is important to always show your best work because

you never know who might be watching you. For example, Ted A., before being given the chance to sub at *Wicked*, explained that he took a low-paying gig where he was playing some of the difficult songs from *Wicked*. In the audience that night was Matthew Sklar (composer of *The Prom*, *Elf*, and *The Wedding Singer*) who really liked Ted's playing. That led to him being hired as the associate for *The Prom* when it went to Broadway. As Ted puts it, "I one hundred percent think that I got the associate position for *The Prom* because I took this free gig playing *Wicked* years before."

Alvin shared the story of working as the audition pianist for *Anastasia* in 2013 or 2014. In the room for those auditions was the composer, Stephen Flaherty, who made a mental note that he liked the way Alvin worked with the singers as they came in for their auditions. Several years later, in 2017, Stephen Flaherty—remembering those audition days—reached out to Alvin to see if he would be interested to work as the music director for *Once on This Island*. (Incidentally, Ted Sperling shared a strikingly similar story about Stephen Flaherty taking notice and offering him work later on.)

Steven Cuevas also told a story of someone noticing him. "I got that phone call out of the blue. And it was the sort of thing where it was like, 'we've been wanting to hire you for so long.' And I've never been hired by this contractor before, so I was like, really? You know who I am?"

Another related idea to the fact that you don't know who is watching, is that eventually someone has to take a chance on you in order to hire you for a first high profile job. Ted A. explained, "If you're on Broadway, someone gave you a chance, or took a chance on you." Justin Mendoza's explained that Alex Lacamoire took a chance on him when he was given the national tour of *In the Heights*. Similarly, Justin believes that Stephen Oremus (music director/supervisor for *Avenue Q*, *Wicked*, *All Shook Up* and others) took a chance on him. Justin explains that

Stephen, “blind hired me. He took a chance on me. I never ever worked with him directly, but I guess Lack [Alex Lacamoire] had spoken highly of me, or I don’t know.” One final example of this concept was shared by Joe:

Tommy was about to go into production in La Jolla when—thank the gods in heaven—their music director bailed. And so, they were stuck for a music director. Steve Margoshes said to Des McAnuff—Steve had already been hired as the orchestrator of *Tommy*—he said to Des McAnuff, there’s this kid in New York who’s playing auditions, and he’s a really good player, and I know he has some music direction experience. How about him? And I flew out to La Jolla, and played ‘Pinball Wizard’ for Des, and got the job.

Developing New Work

Another stepping stone that could potentially lead to work on a Broadway show can come by being a part of the developmental scene. That is, readings of new shows, workshop productions, out of town productions, and so on. One way that music directors do this is by building and maintaining relationships with the creators—composers, lyricists, and book writers. This concept also came up as a way to maintain a career (more on this in Chapter 7). For example, Ted S., described that after working as a pianist and assistant for a number of years, realized that he needed to do something to move up into the music director job. He explains,

I decided very consciously to seek out the writers who were my generation who might not have a long-term music director yet because they were at the same stage I was. They were just getting their feet wet. I had already met a lot of them. I had worked with some of them on readings. And I just made it known that I was ready to music direct and I wanted to do their stuff. So that list included Adam Guettel, Ricky [Ian] Gordon, Janine Tesori, Bill Finn, Flaherty & Ahrens... And so, I started to do more work with them.

Andrea explained that one important reason for staying connected to the “development scene” is because there is an element of luck in terms of what show might end up on Broadway. Meaning, it might simply be a matter of knowing the right people, “working at that level who have charmed the producers at this moment and are getting their shows into Broadway theaters.” Haley, likewise, is working to maintain those types of relationships because one ambition or

dream she has is to work on a new show and “see that fully come to fruition in a full production.”

6.5 Barriers to Entry

A final, and important, topic to include in this chapter—which has examined the pathways that Broadway music directors have taken in order to end up where they are—is to include a discussion of the barriers that make entry into the profession difficult to achieve. These barriers include the fact that it can be hard to get into the room, jobs in Broadway orchestra pits are generally not advertised, there are a limited number of jobs on Broadway at any given time, gatekeepers play a major role in determining who is invited to participate, the nature of the work is still misunderstood within the industry, classically trained musicians might look down on musical theater jobs, and the fact the pay can be very low outside of Broadway. On top of all of these potential barriers, there exist additional challenges that are unique to the experience of women and people of color. This next section will describe some of these barriers. A discussion of what can be done to help people overcome these barriers will be included in Chapter 8. These barriers, in many ways, represent a flip side to many of the concepts that have been discussed previously in this chapter.

Getting in the Room is a Challenge

While piano skills serve as an important way to gain entry into the room, piano skills also represent a barrier for individuals who might make wonderful music directors otherwise. For example, Alvin explained, “I know fantastic people who have conducted shows or led side gigs” at places like “54 Below, pick a place you know, Joe's Pub.” For example, he explains that a guitarist might be able to “lead with their ax” [instrument] or that he knows of drummers who

would be capable. Unfortunately, he laments, “I’m sure there are more people that have that skill set that just don’t speak up because they know they’re never gonna hire a French horn MD.”

Another barrier to getting into the room is related to networking. Zane explained that, “95 percent of the time” the people who get jobs get them because of who they know. Zane then explained, “What I would like to see is some other people get a chance to get in the mix.”

Jobs are not advertised

Music positions for Broadway shows are usually not advertised. This idea, which emerged in the conversations with participants in this study, was also mentioned in the literature review (see Morley, 2011). For example, Avin explained that, “we don’t usually have the luxury of auditioning people. And there are no casting breakdowns for orchestra... ‘Here’s the next show coming up. It needs two trombones and one French horn’... that doesn’t exist!” Cynthia likewise exclaimed that “it’s still very much not an audition-based field. It’s not like you can just go apply for jobs. People have to know you and put your name in.” Joe Church, cynically provided a scenario where a producer or director might hire a music director simply because their “nephew is a music director.” Joe went on to say that it is,

Maybe not that bad. But it is, ‘I’ve worked with that guy or gal before, and was really happy. Let’s use them.’ It’s a sort of a more simplistic decision. It’s not an informed or musically sophisticated decision. It’s much more based on what works. And if it worked before, it might as well work again. And even if it didn’t quite work, it was comfortable. So let’s do it again.

Limited Number of Jobs

A recent scan of the Playbill.com page which lists all of the current and upcoming Broadway shows includes a listing of 31 musicals and 10 plays in addition to a number of special events (such as solo concerts or limited engagements). Essentially this means that there are a limited number of theaters in which musicals are produced, which in turn means that there are a

limited number of jobs available for aspiring and established music directors alike. Not to mention a limited number of music positions to play in Broadway orchestras. These positions are highly coveted—especially to have a chair in a pit. Zane, pulling numbers out of the air to make a point explained, “say there's 1000 jobs on Broadway, but 4,000 musicians” in New York who want those jobs. “Well, already, we got a problem!” John Bell was more succinct in his explanation: “the fact is there’s not a lot of Broadway MD positions out there.” They and others interviewed for this project went on to explain that a successful career as a music director should not necessarily be limited to working on Broadway (more on this in Chapter 7).

Orchestra Contractor

While the music director or music supervisor is involved in the decision making in terms of who is hired to play for a Broadway musical, historically speaking, the orchestra contractor has long acted as a gatekeeper for Broadway jobs. For example, Zane described the “contractor system” in which the people working as contractors “controlled who was in the pits.” The problem for many aspiring music directors or musicians is that if the orchestra contractor doesn’t know who you are, they are not going to call you. If you do not have a good reputation, they are not going to call you. Or, worse still, if you weren’t (historically speaking) the right gender or the right race, they were not going to call you.

Andrea and Haley described circumstances which give hope that the contractor system has been changing in recent years. Haley explained that she, as a side hustle, often works as a contractor hiring orchestras and Andrea said that she is very much involved in the process of hiring the orchestra that will play for the upcoming production of *Suffs*.

Misunderstood-Even Within the Profession

When young musicians are considering career options, a career as a music director is not always the first thing that might come to mind. This idea lines up nicely with the concept of the music director being “unseen” as was detailed in a substantial section of the literature review. For example, as was previously shared, Haley didn’t think of music direction as a career possibility until after getting an internship with *Porgy and Bess* because in her mind working in theater meant working as an actor. David, described how he initially considered a different career because he hadn’t seen role models. He explained that the musicians he knew growing up all had “other jobs” and were not professional musicians. For example, the organist at his church also worked for the CIA and the pianist there worked for the Air Force! Steven, likewise, explained that he had no idea what a music director did until he started participating in theater in college. Ted A. put it this way, “When I was growing up, or when I was thinking about becoming a music director, I didn't know what that was, you know? Honestly, I thought the music director conducts a show. That's what they do. I'm like, yes, that's true. But there's so much more to that.”

Haley explained, “We’re often even overlooked in press releases for shows. Often, they don't even include the music director. You're like, it's a musical!” Alvin shared the example of how people who will come up to the orchestra pit to say hello to him after a performance and say, “That was really cool. So what's your day job?” Alvin then has to explain that, “this is my day to day *and* night job. Because, there's so much more that goes into it.” In fact, Alvin declared that for him “the easiest part of being an MD is the 3 hours of the show because, hopefully you've rehearsed it enough.”

Even people working within the industry don’t always understand what it is that the music director does. For example, Andrea explains that she has had to advocate for “music directors getting credited.” She went on to describe a recent conversation with the producer of

Suffs in which she explained, “Basic rule, if you credit the choreographer, credit the music director or supervisor. The end. Just do that. That's it. Why is it so complicated?” David, in a similar line of reasoning explained that “from a purely from a union and financial standpoint, the choreographer and the director are very much aligned in terms of how they're treated by producers. And the music director has been completely shunted aside.”

Perhaps Alvin sums up this misunderstanding the best when he explained:

It's sometimes really disheartening how the name of what we're doing is a musical. And so often the lighting design gets more attention than music does. Or the costumes, or the fill in the blank. And those pieces are important. I don't discredit them. I mean, they are part of everything, but it's like, if the music doesn't sound good, what the band's playing, what the cast is singing... if you want to come see a musical, the music has to be right. And if I say I need an extra stand light for whatever particular reason, give me the stand light. Or whatever the thing is because... I think the music's got to come—if not first, very close to first—so that we can all work together.

Traditional Views of Musical Theater Styles (vs. Classical, etc.)

Another barrier to entry into this career has to do with the attitudes musicians might have towards musical theater styles. Examples of this emerged in the interviews—particularly from the standpoint of classically trained musicians somehow coming to think that other styles of music are lesser in value or quality. Take for example Steven who studied classical piano and yet described it was because his piano teacher was at the end of her career and thus “not caring” as an excuse to allow him to play popular music in his lessons. Or Cynthia, as previously mentioned, describing how she “actively turned [her] nose up at musical theater” and Joe who thought theater music was “un-groovy.” Ted Sperling even described the internal tug-of-war he had early in his career when trying to decide whether to pursue classical orchestral conducting or musical theater—a struggle in which his desire to work in musical theater won out thanks to the extraordinary opportunity he had in working on *Sunday in the Park with George*. This conflict

between traditional western classical music traditions and musical theater has implications for music educators (more on this in Chapter 8).

Low Pay Outside of Broadway

Finally, another barrier—perhaps one of the biggest—is the fact that music directors outside of Broadway are not always compensated sufficiently for their work. Thus, there is a financial burden associated with the lower rungs of the ladder that music directors climb as they work their way up to Broadway. Ted S., for example, recognized that he was lucky in that regard. “I was lucky I had a very cheap rent so I could be a little picky about which projects I took. And I tried to pick things that were always going to be interesting and challenging.”

John explained that he understood the reality of the finances. “Not everyone's in the place in their life to do some small project and really not make a lot of money.” He expressed hope that in the future some of the “smaller venues will pay better.” Alvin described turning down low paying jobs simply because, if he had taken a taxi in order to carry his gear, he might not make enough to “cover the cost.”

Ted A. explained that sometimes though, early in a career, it might be better to think of a low paying (or no pay) gig as an investment for the future. He described telling his parents about low paying work and “they'd say, oh, you can't be doing that for free,” but Ted would then explain to them that, “it's not for free. This is an investment for things to come.” Justin shared a similar sentiment that sometimes “it wasn't about the money. It was just for the experience” especially considering the gig that ultimately led to his Broadway connections. The reality is, that there is a real financial barrier associated with achieving a career as a music director on Broadway.

Challenge for Women and People of Color

Beyond the challenges or barriers already mentioned in this section, there have, historically speaking, been additional barriers that women and people of color have faced when trying to achieve a career as a music director. As was highlighted in the literature review, the voices of women and people of color were nearly absent from any conversation surrounding the work and careers of Broadway music directors. This reality was highlighted in the interviews.

Historically speaking, the makeup of Broadway orchestras was primarily white men, and in fact, older white men. Describing her time in the mid-nineties when she was trying to break into Broadway work, Cynthia explained, “There were a number of jobs that they just weren't giving out to women... and the all-male bands were not terribly kind to women at the time.” She even described an instance in which she was simply told, “we’d love to consider you for this, but we’re not hiring women to be a music director for the show because the music director rises out of the pit and we really like the look of a man in the tuxedo.”

Beyond the simple barrier of not being hired, Cynthia shared an experience in which she experienced blatant misogyny and was told to her face, “I don’t take direction from girls.” Andrea shared a similar experience of working on a show in which a member of the creative team would simply ignore her (she was the music director) and instead that person would speak to one of the other members of the music team such as an assistant or the orchestrator. Haley, on the other hand explained that while she hasn’t directly experienced blatant misogyny herself, she has “experienced the after effects or permutations of that.” Haley expressed frustration that because, as a woman who tries to lead with kindness:

That can be more easily misconstrued as a woman than it is if a man does that. There's something about [women] not seeming authoritative if [they're] not yelling. And there's this persona that we sort of associate with leadership that we're all learning is not necessarily what makes the best leader. And I just think that as a woman you have even one more step to prove that that's the case.

In order to combat these negative stereotypes and the after effects of the historical struggles faced by women trying to make it in this industry, there are now organizations devoted to helping women and people of color find entryway into Broadway careers (more on this in Chapter 8).

Black Shows / White Shows

Women are not the only group who have faced barriers to entry into the field. The same is true for people of color. Zane explained that when he was starting (back in the 1970s) that the music contractors at the time would view shows as being either white shows or black shows. Thus, “they hired black guys to play the black shows because only they knew how to play that type of music. Bullshit!” Luckily, Zane went on to explain that he personally was not affected by that culture. “You know the horror stories with the contractors in the beginning... I didn't have to deal with any of that stuff. So, a lot of the mess, I wasn't involved in.”

Alvin brought up a hypothetical situation in which someone might make a snap judgment and assume that he could do “*Dreamgirls* and *Jelly's Last Jam*.” But he continued,

You know I'm not gonna hold that against you. If that's your first thought, everyone has an initial, snap reaction about something. But what's the harm in interviewing me, or like taking me out for coffee, and saying, hey, how'd you grow up? What'd you do? I know you're gonna ask me these questions later. But it's like, I can play Chopin if that's what you need. I have a classical background.

Both Zane and Alvin expressed hope that things are getting better. They too are involved in work to help create a pipeline for aspiring musicians and music directors. More on this in Chapter 8.

6.6 Summary of Chapter 6

This chapter explored the interview and focus group data for answers that emerged in response to the second research question, “What pathways do Broadway music directors take in

order to (a) develop the necessary skill and (b) end up working on Broadway?” The emerging answers included a discussion of the various potential entry points into the field that exist beginning with a conscious decision to pursue such a career. This lined up with the framework of the Theory of Expertise. An exploration of potential entry points into the career highlighted the importance of piano skills and those skills associated with the position of a music assistant. This chapter also explored how music directors learn to do the job, with a special emphasis placed on getting in the room where it is possible to observe others doing the job in addition to gaining hands-on experience. This also included a discussion of how the participants in this study demonstrated deliberate practice as they focused on learning the specific skills needed for the job.

The pathway that leads to working on Broadway was also explored. This included a discussion of a potential “ladder” that is climbed while working through assistant positions or in other theatrical contexts outside of Broadway such as national tours, regional theaters, summer stock productions or even school productions. Also highlighted was the importance of developing a network of connections within the industry and always striving to present your best self because, especially early on in a career, you never know who might be watching.

Finally, the chapter ended with a discussion of multiple barriers to entry into the profession that exist. These barriers include the limited number of jobs available, the misunderstood nature of the profession, financial barriers, and also the extra challenges faced by women and people of color. The ways in which music directors are working to create a pipeline to help aspiring artists overcome these barriers will be included in the final chapter (Chapter 8).

Chapter 7: Research Question 3—The Maintenance

*Hold on, hold on to someone standing by.
Hold on, don't even ask how long or why!
Child, hold on to what you know is true,
Hold on 'til you get through.
Child, oh child! Hold on!*
(from *The Secret Garden* by Lucy Simon)

A number of concepts that have helped the participants maintain careers as Broadway musicians have emerged from an examination of the interview and focus group data. These concepts include: the importance of a good reputation, establishing good working relationships with others in the industry, understanding the challenge of freelance work, keeping multiple irons in the fire at all times, and even managing personal expenses. Each of these concepts will be explored in this chapter.

7.1 Never Stop Looking

Connections and Reputation

As the participants talked about what they do to maintain a career, the importance of networking and maintaining relationships was a recurring theme—this echoes or represents a continuation of some of the contents discussed in the previous chapter (see Chapter 6). Thus, the ability to make connections not only helps a person land their first Broadway gig, but it is an important component of finding the next one and so on. For example, Ted A. explained how his current position as music director for *Back to the Future* on Broadway was the result of a connection made several years prior while playing auditions for *Dreamgirls*. Haley, likewise, explained how her work on *Diana the Musical* resulted in connections that led to her current position with *& Juliet*. Supporting this idea, Ted S., described developing “a strong network of friends” starting in his college years who continue “to work together to this day in various

combinations.” Speaking of the importance of those types of connections, Joe’s advice was simply: “Stay with the producers, the music team, the contractor/coordinator. That’s very, very important. Stay friends with them. Stay on the scene immediately. You know, don’t sort of fade into the background.”

Several of the interview participants explained that an important component of maintaining those connections is your reputation, or as John Bell called it, “your track record of success.” Zane, for example, spoke of a guitarist who he worked with who would regularly show up 30 minutes early to gigs. Seeing that guitarist’s punctuality made Zane want to keep working with him. “I want that on my team like, my man that comes to rehearsal a half hour early—might just do that because he doesn’t want to get stuck on the train—but I appreciate that. I’m gonna call that guy again.”

One way Zane has developed his own reputation is with the attitude he brings to each new project he works on. He explained, “I’m only as good as the last job I just did. So, Daryl Waters and I have a joke: this is the last gig we’re ever gonna do. So, we’re, gonna, you know, balls to the wall, we’re full out all the time.” Zane further explained that he recognizes that he has been fortunate to have great opportunities.

I am beyond blessed that I haven’t had to go out and try to get on a job. Again, for better or worse, I don’t know if it’s good or bad, but I’d like to think that if someone was doing a black show and they needed a dance music arranger, eventually my name would show up. Whether I get the gig or not is secondary, but I know my name would show up, and I don’t take this lightly at all. I know I’m blessed because of that. You know, it’s not that I’m so fierce. I don’t think what I do is. I just understand the groove, the pocket... what dancers need. I think I know that.

Alvin also talked about the importance of developing a good reputation. He explained that,

Word of mouth... it’s so crazy in this industry. People talk a lot. And I think that’s just one of the caveats or precautions... people are gonna talk about you. Period. There’s no

way around that. You want them to say good things about you. Want them to pass along good words.

Recognizing this reality, Alvin asks himself, “What can I do to make sure that I leave here having people think that I did deserve to be here?” He added to that thought by saying, “hopefully, I've made enough connections and done enough things well enough to have people still call me. I hope that continues.” Alvin also used this line of reasoning by explaining,

I think if you are really good in this business, if you have made a lot of connections and have a good reputation in this industry. When a show is closing, you could be fortunate enough that someone would reach out and say, hey, I know your show is closing. Would you be interested in doing this? And that's only if you have a great reputation in this industry. And I know that happens to a lot of people that are good, they just are consistently working.

Establishing Good Working Relationships

An important part of a person’s reputation is related to the working relationships that are developed with others working in the industry. These working relationships might be with other people working on music teams, members of the creative team, or other positions within a Broadway company. Ted S. explained the importance of that collaboration amongst the creative team. “I always wanna feel like we're gonna have a good collaboration amongst the three people in charge... and the composer, lyricist, director, choreographer. So, if I feel like that chemistry is gonna be off, I might be wary about taking a job.” He also explained that, “in any aspect of the theater, working personality is a big factor because it is such a collaborative art forum. And you spend so much time together. And you, you want the room to be productive and happy.”

Ultimately, Ted S. explained,

I do think people have a choice of many good music directors. So, it becomes more about who are they comfortable with? Who do they think understands their music well? Who do they want to be in a room with? Who do they want to trust their material to?

Haley agreed in her assessment, by saying “I want to make sure that the room that I'm in is going to be a supportive and positive environment to work in.” Andrea put it this way,

You reach a point where the base skill set has been met. You're not figuring out if someone can play anymore. You're not figuring out if someone can lead rehearsals anymore. You're just looking for the right match.

She also explained that a director wants to find a collaborator “who makes things easier. Doesn't make things harder.”

Zane extended the importance of the working relationship beyond the rehearsal room to everyone involved in a production. He says a music director needs to “play well with others,” not just play their instrument, play well but in the way they approach the work environment. “You have to kinda get along with everybody, know all the personalities that you're dealing with.”

Carmel Dean, in the focus group discussion, provided some examples of what might constitute a bad working relationship:

Your job is to make sure the music is as good as it can be. But you could be really good at that *and* really terrible at communicating with other people around you... You could be a terrible listener, or you could not be willing to give over an hour of rehearsal to the choreographer who really needs it... re-spacing, you know, something like that. It's like being a team player.

Alvin takes notice when someone he is working with goes the extra mile. “Those are the kind of folks I wanna work with. People who would go the extra yard, who would pitch in... it's just that level of, I got your back. We're all doing this together.” He therefore explained, “I want to network with folks like that and be friends with, and colleagues with, those kinds of people.”

Perhaps Ted A. gives the most succinct summary of this concept: “What really is going to separate you is how well you work with other people.”

Challenge of Freelance Work

In addition to the challenge of networking, establishing a good relationship and finding people who want to work with you, the work of music directors is complicated by the fact that not all gigs are long term. This freelance aspect of the job can be challenging. Haley explained that, “You always have that feeling that the rug could be pulled out from under you at any moment, which is the joy of freelancing.” She continued the thought by explaining that one part of maintaining a career is keeping your mind on the future:

The fear never goes away. I remember that was one of the things that surprised me most when I started working. I thought, oh, it's probably just me... I'm young, so I'm worried about what the next job is gonna be. I'm new to freelancing. And then I would see actors who are at the top of their game... these incredible Broadway actors who everybody knew and saw that they were also worrying about what their next gig was gonna be. And I'm like, oh, I get it. It doesn't get better, like that is gonna continue to be a thing. And that's okay. That's just part of it. We just accept that. And you know. So, I think that was sort of eye-opening for me.

Alvin, at the time of his interview, admitted that he had recently lost his work because the show he was working on had closed. “I have no shame in saying this—‘cause currently I don't have a show... I'm not playing a show nightly.” So, he was keeping his eye out for the next opportunity. In the end, his reputation and connections worked in his favor, because he is now working as the keyboard 2/associate conductor for *The Lion King* on Broadway.

Multiple Irons in the Fire

One way that these music directors try to make finding their next gig a little easier is by being involved in multiple projects, at various stages of development, at any given time. This could also include taking on side gigs such as playing for cabaret acts, playing auditions, vocal coaching, and so on. For example, David explained that he is currently associated with “20 projects at various stages of development.” He admitted, however, that because he isn’t currently conducting eight shows a week, he has the time to do that. Even so, he explained, “when I was [conducting regularly] I was usually arranging at least two other shows on the side. And of

course, as musicians in New York, we're not just doing Broadway.” For David, most of the projects he works on now are as an arranger and orchestrator.

Andrea explained that one way she stays involved in multiple projects is by staying close to the development scene—as in working with folks who are trying to bring new musicals to life.

I did a show out of town this spring... I say yes to a project because of the people... Because I want to build those relationships and being loyal to people who I like has been really important to me and really fruitful for me over the years. So that's how I try to keep myself present.

Haley talked about avoiding periods of no work by following a similar path:

I think the preparation process for trying to avoid that starts before you think the show is going to close. I think a lot of people try to keep their hands in multiple things, knowing that that could always happen. And I think especially things that are at different levels of development.

She went on to explain that she, personally, is continuing to be involved with new works:

So, one of the things that's important for me is that even while I'm on *& Juliet*, I'm still continuing to be involved in developmental workshops of a lot of other new pieces that are at an earlier stage in their process... obviously, if one of them were to be in a full production at this exact moment, I wouldn't be able to do it. But, knowing that they will hopefully go into production at some point... It's helpful to be involved at this stage, because it just gives you a little bit more hope for future things popping up... So I think that the more proactive that you can be, and starting to involve yourselves in other things before you know that your thing is going to end is very helpful.

Ted S. described reaching out to his contacts in order to play as a sub on shows in the times when he didn't have a full-time gig of his own.

I had subbed for people between my regular gigs, and then they had sub for me on my regular gigs. So that was a good network for finding work in between jobs. I played a lot of auditions which was a good way to meet people ultimately... and then I also went to see a lot of things. Made sure to stay in touch with the composers that I wanted to work with.

These examples that the interview participants shared, are closely related to the discussion in the previous chapter related to the scrappiness and hustle that was required to get a start in the industry. Thus, it would seem that in order to keep working in professional theater,

there is a requisite attitude of being willing to be on the lookout for your next potential gig.

David was fairly candid in declaring, “Having one job at a time is a sign of defeat.”

Saving for a Rainy Day

An interesting side note that came up in a few of the interviews—when talking about attributes that contribute to a long career—was a discussion of the importance of managing your finances in a way that you can ride out those in-between times. For example, Joe explained that while working on the national tour of *Little Shop of Horrors* he was able to “put some money in the bank” which then helped him over the next few years as he was still in the early stages of his career. John Bell likewise suggested that after having a good paying job on Broadway, “when you have enough money saved, go do some off-Broadway show that's gonna pay you crap. You know, like, go do a reading. Like, go do regional gigs” because “there's all kinds of places to do musicals with all kinds of amazing people. You know. So that's sort of like what I would encourage younger folks to do.”

Perhaps the most dramatic example of the power of saving was shared by Zane Mark. He explained that he learned the value of saving from his father, a lesson that really paid off during the many months of the Covid-19 pandemic when there was literally no work available for theater professionals. He explained:

My father saved for the rainy day and he instilled it there within me. And, thank God, my wife thinks the same way. So, if anything good came out of Covid, it was that I can *not* work for two years and still keep my lights on and feed my family. And I think that's a thing that a lot of musicians and actors haven't figured out. Especially the young ones, and I'm constantly asking them, you know what's the plan? ...Anybody can go check, see how much money the show's bringing in⁷ and the writing is on the wall. So, you need to prep and handle your business and move on. I'm blessed, blessed, blessed, that I can actually say no to a couple of projects as opposed to have to take everything because I don't know when the next gig is coming. When I was making a lot of money I saved it.

⁷ The weekly gross sales numbers for Broadway shows are publicly available, for example, on Playbill.com. The data includes the percentage of seats sold for each show, the average ticket price and so on. Zane is referencing the fact that it is easy to find out if the show you're working on is doing well financially (or not).

And I, you know, took care of what I needed to do. And I think a lot of us don't do that. And so, when the rough times comes—and they always do—we're not prepared. So again, this is life choices.

7.2 Resilience

Beyond the characteristics needed to maintain a reputation and establish the sort of connections that might lead to more opportunities, the participants also seem to possess another quality: resilience. Examples of the resilience that they possess included: versatility and adaptability to the ever-changing environment, learning to recognize their own limitations and strengths—as well as the strengths of others, and approaching their work with an attitude of lifelong learning. In contrast to that resilience, however, some of the participants shared examples of times when they have felt a sense of imposter syndrome.

Versatility/Adaptability

One characteristic that helps these music directors to be resilient is by keeping an open mind about whatever might happen during the rehearsal process or even during performances. Joe explained, “You never know what's coming around the corner, so you can't go in with a set idea of what being a music director is.” Zane described how, especially when putting a show together, there will be constant changes taking place. So, he said, “if you come in very rigid and stiff, and you can't bend with whatever's gonna happen at that moment, you're not the right person for this job period.” Carmel, in the focus group discussion explained:

If you're in a new musical, and there's a new song going in, and the actor is stressing out because they don't know it. And you've gotta get the charts together... you can't lose your sh**. I have often said that I swear the only reason I get hired half the time is that I'm pretty calm in a stormy situation. Like I'm probably not the greatest pianist out there. Not the greatest conductor, but I know how to contain my stress levels. And I think that's a huge part of it, too! Which is leadership, really. It's not just about your musical chops.

Haley explained that she thinks a good music director is someone who can think on their feet in those rehearsal situations and be open to change:

I think, especially working on new musicals, a lot of the time in the room is spent writing and rewriting and trying something new, and throwing it out and trying something new again. And so, I think it's important to have somebody who is not fazed by that process, and who's able to sort of maintain, you know, calmness and positivity in the face of that, because it is very easy to become stressed by that way of working.

Cynthia also spoke of that hectic process of putting a new show together, "I just think the adaptability of being ready for anything is a really good quality, because there's just no way to know what you're in for until you get started." Joe similarly explained that, "You have to learn to be reactive and sort of take on a task at will. A change on a dime. Give in to things that you normally wouldn't think you'd give in to and find ways to make them work."

Alvin, spoke of the importance of being adaptable when considering your career trajectory:

I think in a lot of professions the direction you should take is a steady way up. You get coffee for your boss... there's like a progression and you should go up. I know a lot of people who do think that way in theater. And I certainly don't. I don't have the mindset of, well, I was keyboard 4, and now [I'm playing] key 3. Well, I'll never go back to keyboard 4 again. That's beneath me. I've been an MD on multiple projects now. Could I, could I go back to being someone's associate? Absolutely! I don't have that kind of ego. I would go back to subbing. I would go back to being an associate. I would just go to be involved in a project and to be part of the family. Must I be the dad all the time? No. I can be the little cousin.

Changing Nature of the Job

One interesting feature of the work of a Broadway music director, is the fact that the nature of the job has evolved over time. Thus, those individuals who have had long careers in the field have needed to adapt to those changes. A number of these changes have already been touched upon earlier in this dissertation. For example, the fact that Broadway orchestras have gotten smaller over time leading to the piano/conductor position. Likewise, the types of technology used in Broadway orchestras has also changed from the types of synthesizers being

used to the computer software used to control the sounds and instruments. These changes have had an effect on the careers of the individuals interviewed for this dissertation.

Steven explained that, “It's also an ever-evolving thing where there are so many different technologies and styles of music that are being incorporated into musicals these days, and so just the idea of being open and receptive to all these different things has also helped me.” Zane wondered what his mentors would think if they entered a Broadway orchestra pit today. “Some of my mentors, if they were alive today, they would walk into a pit and be lost.” He also explained that early on in his career he did a lot of work programming synthesizers, but as the technology changed and became more complicated, he had to make a decision. He said to himself, “either you’re gonna keep programming these keyboards or you're going to actually play. You can't keep up with both of them. You're not gonna be able to do that.” He ultimately gave up programming because he was more interested in playing the music because the programming work “was just too much, and it’s constantly evolving.”

In the focus group discussion, Haley talked about the changing nature of copyist work. With the use of computers and music notation software, work that was previously done by a copyist is now often done by a music assistant in the rehearsal room. Ted S. was quick to add, “That position didn't really exist when I started. We didn't do our own copying.”

David also talked about this change in the industry. “The cost of changing things like keys is pretty easy, especially in the days of Finale or Sibelius.” But he lamented that this change has resulted in pianists no longer learning to transpose on sight. “In fact, that's something that pianists don't even know how to do anymore, is transpose, because it's too easy.” He laments this change because he thinks that a valuable skill is now being lost. “I actually love playing things in

different keys, because you learn something every time. And with the singer, even if you think you know the key, try it a step or a half step higher or lower, and just see what it does.”

Cynthia talked about a shift in the responsibilities of a music director that she has witnessed in her time working in the field.

When I was starting out, I think I would have said musical skill would be top of the list. And I actually now think [that] being a good manager and knowing how to navigate many personalities and many different egos... I actually would prioritize over that.

This change Cynthia mentions is related to the evolution of the titles held by the head of the music team (music supervisor, music director, music coordinator, etc.)—which are not necessarily the same from production to production (as was discussed in Chapter 5). These titles and responsibilities have evolved over time.

Know Limitations/Strengths (I don't know everything)

Given the fact that the work of a Broadway music director comes with a multitude of responsibilities, many of the participants talked about the fact that they recognize the need to accept their own limitations. Musical theater is a collaborative art form—meaning no one person has to do everything (nor can one person do everything). Numerous examples were shared of recognizing both their own strengths and weaknesses as they work with others. This often means leaning on the strengths of others so that the collective effort of the team can benefit the production as a whole.

Haley explained that, “One of the best things that you can do in that music director position is figure out what skills each person brings to the table, and empower them to do what they do best.” Veteran music director Alex Lacamoire (Lacamoire, 2016)—as was previously mentioned in the literature review—demonstrated that he understands this concept when he wrote,

“Everyone who's working on the show is there because of a talent they possess that you don't. Recognize this!” (p. 50).

The participants shared some specific examples of times when they look to others for support. For example, Ted A. explained that he will “lean” on his associate. “I'll send him an email like, hey, what do you think about this? Or what do you think we should do about...?” He then shared an example of turning to a more veteran member of his team for advice regarding situations that arise in the pit. “Our in-house contractor who deals with a lot of the musicians and keeping all the subbing under control, and taking control of that. He's a veteran. He's done this for 30 years.”

Two of the participants mentioned technology, specifically, as an area where they are grateful for the help of others on their team. Cynthia said,

I do not do Mainstage. I don't do Ableton. I don't even like to do Finale or Sibelius. I don't. It's not my thing. I don't like it... So that I feel is a bit of a deficiency for me, but I just never learned it. So anything to do with tech I have to ask for help with.

Alvin, similarly, doesn't feel his strength lies in technology. So, he explained, “I love the value of a team. And knowing, yeah, knowing strengths and weaknesses... and they're like, hey, the music assistant knows Finale real well.” Andrea also appreciates having other people that she can look to for support. She explained that,

People managing is hard, and I've been talking a lot with the contractor on this show about some challenging situations to navigate with people. And I can deal with it, but it's really helpful to talk through it with... it's nice to have another voice just echo back.

Steven might have put it best, when he explained that asking for help is actually a way of showing strength. “Everyone has their strengths, and I think acknowledging when to reach out for help can be [a strength] as well.”

Recognizing your own strengths or weaknesses also came up as a reason that some of the participants might turn down work. Take for example, Zane who described turning down a job because he knew someone else who would be a much better fit. In fact, he suggested that other person for the job. “I think he’s much better equipped to do that than I am, you know? And so, he, I know, is doing much better than I would have ever done on that job.” Steven offered a similar thought when he said, “We really do want to see each other succeed.”

John reasoned that it can be good to have an ego as a music director, but then it is also important to remember that “no one's an expert at everything” and thus, “it's okay to invite other folks into your ecosystem and see what they have to say.” On the flip side, however, Haley explained how a music team can run into trouble, especially if the person leading the team doesn't value the strengths of the other team members:

If you have somebody at the top who is threatened by the idea of people below them having skill sets that they bring to the table... I think that's when you see teams start to go downhill because it just creates an environment that nobody really wants to work in or is able to bring their best selves to. And so, I think it's really important to acknowledge the different skill sets that everybody brings and sort of figure out a way to allow everybody to shine in what they do, because ultimately, at the end of the day, that's also going to create the best products in addition to the best sort of work environment. So, I think that's just an important, often overlooked component of the job.

Lifelong Learning

One of the most surprising findings that has emerged through analyzing the interview and focus group data has been the discovery that nearly every individual who participated in this dissertation study demonstrated a desire to engage in lifelong learning. Carmel, for example, explained,

I've been saying that every show I do feels like a new Master's degree. And I still feel that way. Even though I, obviously, have more experience on every show. I'm still learning new things every time I go into production which is great and exciting. You know, it keeps my brain alive.

A demonstration of the fact that the participants in this study expressed statements which hint at a desire to engage in lifelong learning can be seen in Table 22 below.

Table 22: Selected Examples of Lifelong Learning Mindset Shared by the Participants

Name	Quote demonstrating a quality of lifelong learning
Alvin	I would like to think that the day I stopped learning, the day I choose to not learn from someone else, the day I check out, the day I mail it in... that's the day I should quit
Andrea	One of the things I did when I realized what the Broadway gig was, that I wasn't prepared for, was read a bunch of business books.
Cynthia	I mean there is a lot of work that I will do research wise in terms of either time period of the show, the characters, the show itself. So that I'm super informed when I do help people start to interpret lyrics and phrase from their lyrics and things like that.
David	The goal in life is to never stop growing and learning. And if I ever feel bored, it's my own fault. So therefore, if something is scary or something feels like a huge challenge, then you better try it. You'd better try doing it. And if you fail, at least you've learned something.
Haley	I always sort of thought of piano lessons as being... you do it when you're growing up. But I realize that it's actually incredibly helpful to do as a grown up."
Joe	I have a willingness to try anything.
John	I would also say just try to be open to, you know all kinds of things, and all kinds of experiences, because that's only gonna broaden, you know, the well that you draw from to make music and make art.
Justin	We're never done building our own skill set and also building our network and learning from other people. We're like always in a constant state of school. We should be, I think.
Steven	Oh, yeah, it's just absorbing and just kind of collecting all this different stuff along the years.
Ted A.	The instinct is to be, I'm the music director. I'm going to just do what I think. I'm the director. I'm in charge. And I find, I lean on my associate [conductor] a lot. I'll send him an email like, hey, what do you think about this? Or what do you think we should do about... you know I really trust him.
Ted S.	I would prefer to work in a living, constantly changing, renewing art form.
Zane	You don't know it all. And as soon as you think you know it all, you're dead in the water.

These examples of a desire to engage in lifelong learning are closely related to the examples of deliberate practice that were shared in a previous chapter (see chapter 6). This is also supported by something Joe Church (2015) wrote in his book, "Music is a demanding discipline and a competitive profession, and for the most part, only the strong survive. Musicians know this, and train diligently to gain and maintain their professional status." (p. 334)

Imposter Syndrome

On the flip side of the resilience that the music directors in this study demonstrate, there also emerged a few examples of times when some participants felt that they didn't belong in the industry. Readers of this dissertation might find it comforting to know that even individuals who are working at the top of their field might struggle with feelings of inadequacy or confidence. Joe Church, for example explained that he “never thought” he could make a living as a musician, of course he eventually had a fantastic career.

Alvin talked about the experience of getting his first Broadway gig with *Scandalous* and questioning whether he belonged. “We come along to Broadway; it was pretty good to get there. And it's the same thing it's... How do I fit? Where do I really belong?” Or, he also shared the story of being asked if he could conduct a show and having his initial reaction be, “Hell no! I can't do that. I'm not ready for that!” Alvin went on to explain what he does to combat those feelings by reminding himself of the work he put in to get where he is. He described that as “moments of self-care, self-reflection... those moments are necessary to have with yourself.”

Andrea had a similar reaction when she was asked to have an interview with David Yazbek to become music director for *The Band's Visit*. She explained, that after getting the phone call her initial reaction was “I assumed I was not qualified, and I was not going to get the job.” However, after a weekend of serious preparation, she met with Yazbek and ultimately landed the job.

Haley was willing to admit that she still worries that her piano skills are not good enough. “I think going back to the piano piece, that for me is the piece in my own sort of like toolbox that I am constantly a bit insecure about.” So, she makes sure to either put in the work to get “comfortable playing a piece” or to “hire a team of people that I know complements my skill

set.” A final example comes from Justin, who has developed a mindset to calm himself in those moments when he feels that sense of imposter syndrome. “I sometimes have that little voice where I still don't know what I'm doing. But ultimately that's the way to learn. I am still learning by staying present and making mistakes.”

7.3 Leadership

Leadership Skillset/Mindset

Beyond the resilience that the music directors displayed, another important quality that has helped the participants maintain their careers is the fact that they are great leaders. As they worked their way through the career, they have developed qualities that help them in the managerial aspects of the job. The previously shared example of Haley making an effort to lead with kindness is one example of great leadership. Other examples of positive leadership emerged from the stories shared by the participants.

Zane described the mindset he has, as the leader of the music team: “Even if somebody else misses a cue or messes up, it's my fault. And I take the blame and the shoulder for everything. And in doing that, my team supports me because I support my team.” Justin also brought up the concept of a team. He explained that a piece of advice he received early in his career has stuck with him that the music director needs to be a team player:

We all have a healthy sense of ego, and in a management position, and as a leader you have to have authority, and you have to have a certain amount of command because you have to be a leader. But with that I think you have to also give respect. And make sure that you remember you're working with other humans, other artists who have their own healthy sense of ego and their own artistry that are defined by it. And so, someone who can embody that leadership while also being—I'll keep returning back to the statement—a team player... Almost like a camp counselor of sorts.

Speaking of this type of leadership, Ted S., in the focus group discussion, explained,

I think it can sound, from our conversation so far, that we're all very calm and collected and service oriented. But sometimes you also have to be the boss... You have to make

sure people are doing what they're supposed to be doing, and you have to have authority. So, nobody wants somebody weak in that position. So that's a good balancing act one has to define.

In the first focus group discussion, Cynthia shared an example of her time working on *The Lion King* when she was tasked with giving notes to actors who had drifted in their parts from what had been rehearsed. This led to a fascinating exchange between the participants. Cynthia said that she liked to take an individual approach in speaking to the actors. She felt that “everybody needed a different kind of managerial approach.” She went on to explain, “I find it worthwhile to sort of go individually to every person. So, I take that on as a music director.” She feels that by doing that, she can “set them up for success and get the product” to be what she would want it to be. After she described her individual approach, she then declared, “as I hear myself saying that I'm like, why don't I just tell them to sing the f***** part?!” Andrea then jumped in to say, “That’s good management, seeing each individual.” Carmel quickly added, “It really is.” Zane Mark then added that this reminded him of something he had heard another music director say, which is “the higher up the ladder I climbed, and the more work I’m doing... I’m doing more social work” because, at the end of the day “it’s a big deal to make sure that these people in front of you get along together.”

Professionalism and High Standards

Another quality that seemed to abound among the participants is a real sense of professionalism. They understand that they are working in commercial theater—an entertainment business, but they take their work seriously and they give it their all. Zane, for example, described the feeling that he often has, even after a show has opened, that it could be better. “You know I'm never really 100% happy with anything that I've done...I'm always trying to make it better, you know?”

Alvin, explained the professional approach he takes when he is playing as an audition to present the best possible support for the actor:

I'm not an actor. I can imagine the level of stress in an audition. You're like, 'I'm singing for frickin' Steven Flaherty. He's alive—the composer's still alive and he's standing 10 feet from me, and I'm auditioning with him to do this show...' I think if I'm in that situation, and it's just one singer, one player, and someone messes up—it's back to that family thing—I don't know you, but you made a mistake, and I think it's my job to try to paint you in the best lighting.

It was exactly that professional, supportive attitude Alvin displayed that made Stephen Flaherty take notice and eventually hire him as music director for the *Once on This Island* revival.

Two other examples that exemplify this type of attitude come from David who declares, “The best show I ever worked on is the show I'm working on” and Justin who described that on a long running show he always tries to stay present in the moment in order to have the best possible show each night.

7.4 I Love My Job

*There's no business
Like show business
Like no business I know
Everything about it is appealing
Everything that traffic will allow
Nowhere could you get that happy feeling
When you are stealing that extra bow
(from Annie Get Your Gun by Irving Berlin)*

The final section of this chapter explores obvious delight that the participants have experienced in their careers. This will include examples of why they love their work, the gratitude they feel for the opportunities that have come their way, and even the fact that for many of them, now in their later career, they can pick and choose projects. Finally, a number of the participants expressed, as advice for aspiring music directors: artistically satisfying experiences can be found outside of Broadway.

I Love My Job

If one thing is true, it is the fact that everyone who participated in the individual interviews and the focus group discussions expressed through words—or through the passion they exhibited as they told their stories—that they love what they do. Working in musical theater as a music director can be an incredibly rewarding career.

Ted S. explained that after he got a job on a Broadway show he didn't want to go back to school and study conducting (his original plan at the time). "I got a job on a Broadway show, and I felt that I was learning so much and enjoying myself so much I couldn't imagine going back to school at that point.

Justin described an experience he had with an actress who works with him at *The Book of Mormon*. He was "checking in" with her and somehow, they ended up singing "Part of Your World" from *The Little Mermaid*. Justin explains that she "started jumping up and down" and then she said, "oh, my god, I love that song! I used to sing it as little girl in my mirror!" In that moment, Justin had a realization:

That musical theater kid that's so excited about musical theater is still in there sometimes. But we forget oftentimes when we're doing work, you know? I'll always be a musical theater kid at heart. And I think all of us who end up doing this on this level are or should remember that.

Zane shared a similar sentiment when considering what it is he has been able to do for his career. He explained: "My father used to say, everyone else goes to work, to work. We go to work to play! We got a revel in that man!" He then went on to ask a hypothetical question,

How many people did you go to junior high school or high school with that were really talented at whatever it is that they did... and you're doing what you love and they're doing their gig that they don't love.

To sum up this idea, Joe declared: "Good news, there's nothing like making good music with good musicians, I mean, I'm sorry. There's just nothing like it in the world!"

Gratitude

The participants, beyond having a love of what they do, also expressed ample gratitude for the opportunities that have come their way. For example, John explained that he will at least take the time to consider every job that he is offered, “It’s so hard to get a job in this business that you know it’s sort of a blessing when it happens. So I’m not sort of a person who’s quick to just sort of turn things down.” Ted A. expressed gratitude for the fact that he has not had to spend much time in between jobs since the COVID-19 pandemic. “I’ve been very fortunate that since the pandemic I have been going from job to job, I mean, that’s been... I’ve been very fortunate in that regard.”

Zane was particularly filled with gratitude when he described a time a number of years back when he, his wife, and his daughter all had Broadway gigs at the same time—in three different shows. He explained:

I was doing *Holler If Ya Hear Me*, my daughter was in *Motown*, and my wife was doing *After Midnight*. And you know, for a black guy, humble beginnings... the three of us on Broadway... I would come up [out of the subway], the billboards were there, and I’d see my wife’s billboard behind my marquee. I’m going, yeah, I’m blessed, man. And I don’t take any of this stuff for granted. Yeah. And you know, thank you, Jesus!

Ability to pick/choose in later career

Another element of their careers that several of the participants were able to express gratitude for is the fact that at a certain point they were able to be more selective in deciding which gigs to take. For example, Cynthia—who now works in higher education—explained that she still has Broadway connections that she was able to use to her advantage when she had a sabbatical,

I called all my contacts and was like, hey! FYI, in a year I’m gonna have a year off. And so, I ended up having the *Come from Away* tour and then two other Broadway shows that all were offered at the same time that I could have done that year of sabbatical.

Even the participants who are not as far along in their careers how they have earned some flexibility in terms of what they choose to do. For example, Haley explained, “I think I'm starting to get to a point in my career where I'm lucky enough to be a little bit more particular.” Justin explained that, he has other priorities at the moment, including building his family through an adoption. He explained,

I don't think I will ever leave The Book of Mormon until it closes. I mean, I'm lucky that we're still running and still bringing the audiences, and my husband and I are on the adoption journey so hopefully, if all things go well, we'll be dads soon. And that's going to be its own journey.

Andrea also talked about how she feels comfortable exploring other opportunities outside of Broadway. “This year I've been doing other stuff outside of theater. I'm training to be an Alexander Technique teacher. I do voice teaching which I like a lot.”

Ted A. recognized this aspect of his career journey as well when he explained:

I think as you grow in this business, if you're lucky, you can be more selective in what you choose to do. And mostly the jobs that interest me are ones that obviously, if I think they're good shows. I think they're potentially gonna run or go somewhere, or eventually go to Broadway. But also, who's attached to the project if it's someone I really wanna work with, or a good friend of mine... But yeah... if you're lucky, you can be fortunate, you can be more selective in what you choose.

More than Broadway

A final idea which emerged from the discussions with the participants about what it takes to have a long career, is the fact that there are so many opportunities to work as a music director outside of New York and outside of Broadway. John put it this way, “I think we can become very myopic, you know, on this path to Broadway.” In a similar line of thought, Alvin explained,

There are a million theaters in the world... like Broadway's, not the end all be all. The regional theater scene in this country is huge. Just even the northeast. Just go to Goodspeed [Connecticut], go to Barrington [Pittsfield, MA] ...go to Pittsburgh CLO [Pittsburgh Civic Light Opera].

Joe also spoke about this when he explained, “in fact, Broadway is a very small part of the musical theater scene in which music directors apply their trades.” He went on to explain that “some of the best theater is not done on Broadway, and some of the most interesting music direction work is not necessarily done on shows that end up going anywhere.” His advice then, particularly for aspiring music directors:

I think they should understand the reality that it's not just Broadway shows. That music direction is a much, much bigger term. And the excitement of it probably won't come from a Broadway show because so few people get them. For one thing, it'll probably come from some great experience you had doing something somewhere with great people. And wow! What a band that was... the audience was so into it. And, you know, it's all those things together that make good theater.

7.5 Summary of Chapter 7

This chapter explored answers to the third research question, “The Maintenance,” that emerged from the interviews and focus groups discussions. This included a discussion of the fact that individuals who have long careers working as Broadway music directors have developed good reputations, a solid network of professional relationships, and are constantly staying involved in new and upcoming productions. Likewise, the interview participants exhibited resilience that is necessary for overcoming the challenges of working in a freelance environment, in being able to adapt to changes in the industry, by knowing their own strengths and weaknesses, and for some, overcoming the doubt associated with imposter syndrome. Additionally, a description of the leadership and professionalism that these individuals demonstrate in their career journeys was presented. The chapter closed with a description of the joy and gratitude these music directors expressed for the opportunities that have come their way along with an admonition for aspiring music directors to be willing to work outside of Broadway.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

It's the last midnight
It's the last verse
(from *Into the Woods* by *Stephen Sondheim*)

This concluding chapter will include an overview of what the data collected for this study revealed as potential answers to the three research questions. Before doing that, however, it is important to consider whether or not the information gathered in this study is generalizable. On the one hand, this study presents the experiences of 13 Broadway music directors (interviews $n=12$, focus group participants $n=8$), a not-insignificant sample when considering the number of Broadway theaters ($n \approx 40$). However, given the fact that music direction is much more than just Broadway, an argument stating that the data set is too small to be generalizable is also valid. Finally, the fact that this is a relatively new area of research—particularly when considering academic writing on the subject—this study represents something of a first step. On top of that, the data collected for this study also revealed a number of potential avenues for additional research in the future (more of this later in this chapter). In other words, there are plenty of questions that still need answering. Even so, the information gathered and the lessons learned could be of great value to individuals who are interested in understanding the work of a Broadway music director or who wish to have a glimpse of the pathways that might lead to such a career.

Another important thought to consider is the fact that at least one flaw in the research design has emerged in retrospect: A clear definition of the second milestone within the Theory of Expertise—the transition to “full time involvement”—was not explicitly provided. Thus, there could be confusion regarding when it is, exactly, that a person has achieved a Broadway career. Is it the moment they start subbing in an orchestra pit? Is it when they are given a full-time

chair? Or, is it when they become as associate conductor or a music assistant? Or, for the purpose of this study, perhaps it should have been described as achieving a position as a music director or a music supervisor for a professional production. Had this concept been clearly delineated, a deeper investigation into what exactly that transition to “full time involvement” actually looks like could have been included in this research project.

Even so, a number of interesting themes have emerged from the data collected in this study. What follows is a summary of some of the major themes that emerge as responses to the three research questions posed at the beginning of this dissertation. This is followed by a description of how these findings might have implications for teaching and learning—specifically in the fields of music and theater. The penultimate section of this chapter includes a description of what the participants in this study are doing to help create pipelines for the next generation of music directors—particularly as focused on efforts to increase diversity and inclusion in Broadway companies. Finally, an exploration of questions that emerged over the course of this project are presented as potential avenues for future research as a conclusion to this dissertation project.

8.1 Research Question 1: The Job

As was mentioned multiple times throughout this dissertation project, the initial literature review was fruitful in uncovering descriptions of the work of music directors. But the information found tended to focus on amateur or beginner music directors. This exposed a gap in the literature regarding the work and career pathways of individuals working at the highest level of the craft on Broadway. Thus, the interviews and focus groups presented an exciting opportunity to probe for examples of how the work on Broadway might be different than in other contexts. These included:

1. *The Music Team.* The music department of a Broadway production includes multiple individuals with various titles. In more recent times this includes the use of the title music supervisor along with music director. The use of these titles, however, is not standardized and can vary from show to show—or the same person might hold multiple titles within a production. A key theme related to the music team is the importance of a collaborative working relationship within the team in which each team member is able to use their strengths in ways that support the overall production.
2. *The Open-ended Run.* The long running production is a feature of Broadway that plays a major role in determining the nature of the work of a music director in that environment. This included examples of the challenges faced by a Broadway music director when it comes to managing subs, collaborating with other departments, and the importance of fostering a positive workplace environment by cultivating the orchestra pit culture.
3. *High Stakes Environment.* The work on Broadway was described as a high-stakes workplace where the pressure to present your best work is amplified. This pressure comes from budgetary considerations, fast timelines, enhanced scrutiny by the media, and the expectation that Broadway represents the highest levels of artistry in musical theater.
4. *Collaboration.* The nature of the collaborative work of a music director on Broadway can also be different. In particular, this included the fact that living composers (particularly for new works) are often involved in the process, the music team for a Broadway show includes more individuals than what is found in smaller productions (with a greater level of specializations among the various team members), and the collaborative relationship with the stage manager is an important component for maintaining a long running production.

5. *Other Aspects.* Other aspects of the job that could be unique to Broadway, included the possibility of an out-of-town tryout prior to a Broadway production, the fact that Broadway shows have an extended preview period, and the fact that the technology used in Broadway orchestra pits is ever changing and evolving.

8.2 Research Question 2: The Journey

The literature review included scant details regarding the training and career pathways that music directors undertake. At best, the literature revealed either anecdotal examples or fairly short descriptions of the career pathways of Broadway music directors. Thus, the second research question sought to elicit real world examples of what those pathways look like for the individuals who have actually worked their way up the ladder to the position of music director for a Broadway show. The stories collected provided a more detailed description of what that journey might look like. This included:

1. *The Decision.* Stories of a conscious decision to pursue a career in the performing arts lined up nicely with the framework of the Theory of Expertise. While the stories differed from participant to participant—and some participants explained that their decision didn't initially point to a career on Broadway—they all made the choice to put in the effort and work that would be needed for a career as a musician. The participants all displayed examples of scrappiness or initiative once that initial decision had been made.
2. *The Gateway.* Several potential gateways were identified. However, piano skills—more than any other skill—seem to play an important part in gaining entry into the field. Even among the participants who felt that piano skills were not “absolutely necessary” there emerged descriptions of how their own piano skills have served them well in their careers. Additional entry points into the profession were also identified such as

internships or music assistant positions. These non-piano gateways are likely associated with the other positions in the music department—copyist, arranger, orchestrator, etc.—positions which call for skills associated with the various technologies used by Broadway orchestras.

3. *Learning How to Do It.* The development of skills seems to be intricately interwoven with experience. One idea that came up frequently was the importance of being “in the room”—particularly early on in a career—as one of the greatest learning tools cited. Being in the room with veterans allows an aspiring music director to learn from observation while also gaining hands on experience as a member of the music team. Additional stories were shared of the importance of a mentor—often someone that the participant observed “in the room.”
4. *Deliberate Practice.* Examples of deliberate practice, a key tenant of the Theory of Expertise, emerged from the stories shared. In particular, the participants shared stories of recognizing their own strengths or weaknesses in order to identify areas in which they might seek to improve their own skillset either through lessons, personal effort, or other means. This included examples of individuals focusing specifically on their piano skills, conducting skills, managerial capacity, or making a deliberate effort to become familiar with the many styles and the varied repertoire of the musical theater canon.
5. *Climbing Up the Ladder.* The data also revealed that there are, likely, various stops along the way that help prepare a person to become a professional music director. These steps might include, exposure or experience with musical theater on an amateur level (school shows, summer camps, collegiate productions, etc.), summer stock theaters, regional theaters, national tours, off-Broadway productions, and so on. Even, on Broadway,

participants described starting as a sub pianist, playing for auditions, playing for rehearsals, or getting an internship or music assistant position as a type of starting point for a Broadway career. Another important component of the “ladder” that emerged was the importance of building and maintaining connections within the Broadway community not only to find work, but in order to keep present within the industry.

6. *Barriers to Entry*. Examples were also shared of the barriers to entry into the profession, including, the challenge of getting into the room, the fact that jobs are rarely advertised, the limited number of jobs available, the power held by gatekeepers, the misunderstanding surrounding the job, and the low pay outside of Broadway. On top of these barriers, additional challenges exist for women and people of color.

8.3 Research Question 3: The Maintenance

The third research question sought to explore what qualities an individual needs to possess in order to maintain a career in musical theater. An interesting insight is the fact that many of the qualities a person needs to possess in order to get started in the industry are also needed in order to continue working in the industry. These qualities included:

1. *Scrappiness/Willingness to Hustle*. One difficulty faced by individuals who work as music directors is the reality that they have chosen a career as a freelancer. To cope with that challenge, stories emerged of individuals who are always on the lookout for the next possible job. They do this by maintaining a network of connections, establishing and maintaining a good reputation, working on multiple projects at the same time, and even saving money for a rainy day.
2. *Resilience*. The music directors also displayed qualities of resilience over the course of their careers. For example, there emerged descriptions of the need to be very versatile and

adaptable to the ever-changing needs or not only the industry, but even within any single production they work on. Additionally, the participants spoke of a need to recognize their own strengths and limitations as well as those of their collaborators. Thus, they demonstrated a sense of humility in recognizing the strengths of others. This quality of resilience was also accompanied by the mindset of lifelong learning that is needed to stay relevant in the industry. A few participants also shared how they cope with the feelings associated with imposter syndrome.

3. *Leadership*. The participants all exhibited qualities of leadership, or at least a desire to strive to be the best type of leader that they can be. This included examples of professionalism in their work relationships, high standards for the music, and stories of the various approaches they take for managing the members of their team.
4. *Passion for the Work*. The participants in this study clearly have a love for their work. Multiple instances of individuals expressing wonder, gratitude, joy, and love for what they are blessed to do in their professional lives emerged across the interviews. A fascinating idea also emerged here as the interviewees spoke of work outside of Broadway. Numerous descriptions emerged of the idea that artistically and personally satisfying experiences in musical theatre can be found outside of Broadway. As was pointed out, not every music director will be blessed with the opportunity to work on a Broadway show.

8.4 Implications for Teaching and Learning

At the onset of this dissertation journey, a primary purposes was to investigate how Broadway music directors learned how to do the job. The information uncovered in this study, therefore, has some interesting implications for teaching and learning within the realms of music

and theatre. The hope being that in the future we can better prepare individuals who are interested in pursuing a career as a music director.

First, to echo findings from the literature review, music education programs are not preparing music educators—particularly in high school settings—for one of the highly visible parts of the job: music directing the high school musical. High schools across the United States and Canada engage in this—often annual—tradition of putting on a school musical. This study has demonstrated that the job of a music director is complex and requires a wide range of skills. Thus, this study adds to the argument that music education programs could better serve their students by including training and exposure to music direction for musical theater in the curriculum.

Another issue that arises from the information uncovered in this study, is the fact that many (but not all) of the music directors interviewed shared feelings of frustration, or a plain lack of interest, in Western Classical music traditions. Take for example Zane who declared, “I know how to groove. And there's something you don't teach in school! That's years of playing fusion bands, R&B gigs, playing at churches.” Other examples included participants who described actively rejecting classical music as something to pursue. Thus, the question needs to be asked, particularly when considering how important piano and keyboard skills are for music directors, how to better serve piano students in the future. A student-centered approach to piano teaching and learning would enable students to explore other styles of music beyond the Western Classical tradition and better prepare them for a career. In short, there is much more to music than what is taught in many conservatories and music schools.

Beyond piano skills, another extremely important characteristic that emerged in this study is the importance of collaboration and rapport. Musical theatre is, by definition, a collaborative

art form. Helping young musicians to learn how to collaborate and develop rapport with others is therefore another important consideration. If, for example, a young pianist was expressing an interest in learning musical theater styles, it would also be important to encourage that learner to find opportunities to collaborate with singers, actors and other musicians.

Finally, given the importance the participants in this study placed on “getting in the room” it is important for educators to find opportunities for aspiring music directors to gain access to situations in which they can engage in experiential learning—that is to have hands-on experiences working in musical theater rehearsal rooms.

8.5 Building a Pipeline: Maestra and MUSE

A fitting tribute to the music directors who participated in this project, might come by describing efforts that these professionals are making to inspire the next generation of music directors—particularly from the standpoint of diversity and inclusion. Given the barriers to entry that exist (see chapter 6), many of the participants described the work that they are doing to encourage women and people of color to consider a career in musical theater. Ted A. explained that:

I think part of our responsibility is to foster people coming up the ranks. And so, I have made it my mission—because people did this for me—to meet with up-and-coming people. Especially with a show like *Back to the Future* that has a really familiar property—I get a lot of people that are wanting to meet [me] and ask, ‘how do I make it on Broadway?’ I think that's part of the job of the music director to help to foster that.

Two organizations that came up regularly in the conversations are Maestra and MUSE. Maestra, as mentioned in the literature review, is an organization that works to “promote equality of opportunity and to address the many historical disadvantages and practices that have limited women and non-binary composers and musicians in the musical theater” (Maestra, 2022). MUSE (Musician’s United for Social Equity) has a similar mission, focused on people of color, to:

Cultivate more racial equity in theatrical music departments by providing access, internships, mentorships, and support to historically marginalized people of color. MUSE aims to challenge systemic acts of exclusion and support musicians as we transition to a more diverse and inclusive environment for all” (MUSE, 2024).

Ted A., after explaining his desire to foster the next generation, then described how he belongs to MUSE. “We're trying to increase the pipeline of diversity. And that's always important. And I think being in this position allows you to help open doors for people. So that's a big thing for me.”

Alvin talked about how these diversity programs are designed to help identify individuals who might be able to succeed on Broadway:

Are there people out there who are good enough to be Broadway music directors, but just don't know it? They don't know that they have the skill set, or that their brain is capable of translating what they do know into a theatrical language? How do we get those people into theaters? How do we find them and say, hey, you're good at this. Let's just mold you into being great and put you out there in the world.

Cynthia also talked about her work both with Maestra and MUSE, and a challenge she faces in that work, when she explained:

I am in a position where I can help with that pipeline. You know, I'm a mentor with MUSE. I'm a mentor with Maestra. I'm a university professor who still works professionally and has my hand in all those different pots... But if I don't have people getting into my university, then I can't help them get into the profession... even the university level is not early enough in the pipeline.

The challenge of building that pipeline was also mentioned by other participants. Zane, for example, talked about working on a production of *Soul Train* at a regional theater in San Diego. He described how the director, the choreographer and the music supervisor were all Black. But, the musicians in the orchestra pit were an “all-White band playing *Soul Train!*” So, Zane explained there is a need to identify more musicians:

It sounds a little racist or sexist, but you look in any Broadway pit and, older white men. No slight... the guys are playing their butts off. My thing is, how does anyone else get a chance to come in? So you work through the pipelines as a music assistant, rehearsal

pianist, associate. And you work your way up the ladder or through the sub list. But if you don't know who those subs are out there, you know?

Alvin described one approach he is taking. When he is a music director, he encourages the members of the orchestra to think beyond the normal group of friends they might ask. He explained that a chair holder is responsible for identifying five subs who could be called upon, if needed, to play the show. So, he says to the band:

Your fifth person, make it someone that you may not naturally have picked. Make it one of your students. Make it someone who may not have all the experience... bring them in, give them a chance. Show them what subbing is, and show—maybe that young lady or that young person of color, or someone who hasn't gotten a chance—what it is.

He went on to explain that that could mean putting in a little more effort:

If that means that [they] have to work harder, as conductors [we can say], hey, come in early. Can you run this passage with me? What are you looking for? What do I need to know to get out of this safety? ...I think all those things are important. To say, how can a valid pipeline truly be built?

Andrea also talked about the work that needs to be done because building those pipelines and creating those opportunities are things that won't happen naturally. "One of the things that we have to do is prioritize. Even for the parts that we might not be getting paid for. For the good of the show. For the good of the company. For the good of the industry."

Ted S. explained that one thing he does as someone who is teaching the next generation of music directors:

I teach a class in music direction/conducting here [at NYU] and we have a diverse class. I make sure when I'm looking for inspiration or modeling, I include a diverse group of conductors to watch on video. I feel like you can learn by watching really great people. But I make sure *not* to limit that to the usual five white men.

He went on to explain that, when he is looking for associates, assistants, interns, pianists, and so on, that he has to work "a little extra hard" in order to identify those people.

Several of the participants went on to explain that as music directors and music supervisors they have some power to effect change in this area. In short, a music director can be a gatekeeper in a positive way and open up opportunities for those who aspire to the work. Zane, for example, explained that he understands the desire to hire your friends, people that you know you will enjoy working with. But, he explained, “My new line is, we need to make some more friends.” So, he hopes the next time someone is put in the position of music director and is able to make those decisions, they can “look around and ask, what can I do?” The least you can do, he explained, is bring the issue up when it is time to hire a music team and point out those times when there is a lack of diversity.

One caution that came up when discussing this idea of creating a pipeline for the next generation, was the importance of putting the right support in place so that newcomers aren't put into situations where they could fail. Haley explained, “The flip side of the coin is not wanting to put people into situations where they're not going to succeed, because that then sort of has the opposite effect.” This is why organizations like MUSE and Maestra have developed internship programs. These program, Haley explained, are “making sure that we're setting up the steps to allow people to then be successful.” Thus, Haley concluded the mission is to make sure that newcomers “feel comfortable and qualified in the position that they're in” rather than feeling that they were hired just for being a woman or a person of color in order to meet a quota.

Alvin expressed hope for the way things are moving. He hopes that in the future the gatekeepers will be “just looking for the best possible musician” and that the barriers that exist for women and people of color... “We can try to get rid of that.”

8.6 Future Research

As the data for this study was being collected and organized, a number interesting ideas emerged which might serve as avenues for future research. These include:

Communities of Practice.

Early in the process of preparing for this dissertation, an alternative theoretical framework was considered: Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of "legitimate peripheral participation." This framework,

Provides a way to speak about the relations between newcomers and old-timers, and about activities, identities, artifacts, and communities of knowledge. It concerns the process by which newcomers become part of a community of practice. (p. 29).

"Legitimate peripheral participation" might be particularly interesting as an avenue for future research when considering the importance that the participants in this study placed on getting "in the room" as an important part of learning to become a music director. Lave and Wenger, however, explain that

Legitimate peripheral participation is not itself an education form, much less a pedagogical strategy or a teaching technique. It is an analytical viewpoint on learning, a way of understanding learning. (p. 39)

Thus, the data collected for this study could easily be reconsidered using legitimate peripheral participation as a way to talk about how the participants learned to become theater professionals in addition to describing how they gained access to "the room" and undertook the journey from being a newcomer to becoming themselves, the old-timers.

An additional interesting feature of Lave and Wenger's framework is the idea that "newcomers" and "old-timers" interact and work with each other in a "changing shared practice" (p. 48). Given the fact that the nature of the work of music directors has changed over time, and

will most likely continue to evolve, this framework would allow for that change to be considered as part of the process. This indeed seems to be an idea rich for exploration in future research.

However, one reason this framework was not chosen in the early stages of this dissertation project is because of the difficulty in defining the community of practice. Thus, a clear definition might be needed before proceeding with an analysis using Lave and Wenger's framework. Is the community of practice a single Broadway production? Is it the music team within a single production? Or, is the community of practice the larger group of music directors working on Broadway (who, in reality, rarely interact or work together)? Given the fact that music directors move from production to production—even in the early stages of a career—it then becomes difficult to see a community of practice as a stable, organized group, but rather an ever-changing cast of characters that an individual works with and observes over the course of learning and developing their skillset. Nonetheless, the results of the present study demonstrate that legitimate peripheral participation would be an interesting lens through which to analyze the process an individual goes through in order to become a professional music director.

Lifelong Learning.

Lifelong learning, as described by London (2020) is a means of empowering “people to manage their own learning in a variety of contexts throughout their lifetimes” (p. 3). Within this field of research, a number of theories have been proposed to examine whether and how individuals engage in lifelong learning. In considering the characteristics of lifelong learning exhibited by Broadway music directors, a framework that might be useful as an analytical lens was proposed by Sessa and London (2006) who describe three categories of lifelong learning: adaptive, generative, and transformative. The second category, generative learning might be applicable to what was seen in the individuals who participated in this. London (2020) explains

that, “people who seek knowledge, like to try new things, and are sensitive to demands and challenges in their environment have learned how to be generative.” He further explains that,

“Generative learners are ready for transformational change. They seek new ideas and skills, experiment with new behaviors, and set challenging goals for themselves that bring them to new ideal states” (p. 2).

Given the evidence uncovered in this study—in which every single participant exhibited a desire to engage in lifelong learning—the Sessa and London framework could be an interesting angle to use in future research or for an alternative analysis of the data collected for this study.

History of Music Directors.

As was discovered in the literature review, not much is known about the lives of people who have worked as music directors. This is true not only of the current crop of music directors, but also in the past. An interesting avenue for exploration would be to look at the history of the profession—specifically focusing on Broadway conductors. Histories have been written surrounding the development of the musical theater art form. Why not a history exploring the lives and careers of people who have worked as music directors across time?

Broadway and London’s West End.

Professional theatre is not limited to New York City. One location, in particular, that could be of great interest for future research would be a comparative study that examines the training and career pathways of music directors working in London’s West End versus the individuals doing that same work on Broadway productions in New York City.

The Broadway Composer.

Another interesting avenue for potential research would be to examine the relationship the music director has had with composers across time. The literature review included mentions of this facet of the collaborative work of music directors. This is another area that could be

explored more. This avenue of research was suggested from the interview with David Chase who spoke at length about the changing nature of the work of composers on Broadway shows—including the fact that some composers are not really involved in the rehearsal process and leave so many creative and musical decisions up to the music director. This idea also came up in the literature review by McHugh (2015) who argued that Broadway composers would be better described as composer-collaborators.

LGBTQ Topics.

This idea came up in the interview with Joe Church, who described another potential barrier that existed in the past for entry into the field as a music director. Joe claimed that music direction, beyond being a white male profession, in the past was also “very much a gay man’s club that was really hard for a lot of straight guys to break in.” Is this true? This would be an interesting topic for future research.

AIDS and Music Directors.

Perhaps the most touching story that was shared across the interviews was the story David Chase told of how he was given his first Broadway show as a music director by his mentor, James Raitt—who is best remembered for his work as a music director and arranger on such productions as *Forever Plaid* (including supervising multiple national tours), orchestrations and arrangements for the Broadway productions of *Pageant*, *Meet Me in St. Louis* and *Stardust*. (James Raitt, 1994). James was offered the position of music director for the 1994 Broadway production of *Guys and Dolls*. At the time James was, as David put it, “very, very ill with AIDS.” Recognizing the reality of his fate, James approached David and said, “I’m going to be dead, and you should be a music director.” David explained, “He gave me the gift of here’s your first Broadway show, and then he died about 6 weeks after we opened.” That was how David got

started as a music director. David went on to mention that whenever he conducts, he uses James' baton as a tribute to his memory (he held the baton up to the camera in the interview). Hearing the story of James Raitt, leads to the question of whether there are other stories like this out there? How did the AIDS crisis affect music directors? This is yet another potential avenue for exploration.

University Training Programs.

A final area that might suggested by this research as an avenue for future exploration are the university training programs. These programs are relatively new, and are few in number. In these programs a student can major in music direction for the theater. What is the curriculum for these programs? How does the curriculum compare with the real-world skills needed by individuals who aspire to a career as a music director? What similarities exists across the various programs? What are the differences? Answers to these questions might be valuable for shaping the structure of these programs that seek to teach the next generation of music directors.

8.7 Conclusion

Across the individual interviews and focus group discussions, many wonderful stories were shared. These stories have provided a glimpse into what it is to be a music director on Broadway—a profession that has long been misunderstood both outside of the theater community and within. The hope is that this dissertation project has, at the least, shined a light on the vital role that a music director plays in a Broadway production.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Email Text

IRB Approved Recruitment Text:

Dear [Participant Name],

Greetings! I hope this email finds you in good health. Your name was suggested to me by Cherie Rosen (I have worked with her on a few projects over the years). She tells me that you would be a good fit for my dissertation study.

My study, "Becoming a Broadway Music Director", seeks to examine the pathways that Broadway music directors have taken in order to learn how to do their jobs and maintain a career in musical theatre.

If you consent to participate in the study, you will be invited to participate in two discussions lasting a total of two to three hours of your time:

1. Individual Interview (60 to 90 minutes)

An individual interview, conducted over Zoom (to allow for maximum convenience in scheduling), lasting approximately 60 to 90 minutes during which you will be asked about your work as a Broadway music director, the skills needed for your job, your background and training, how you became a music director, and what you do to maintain a career in musical theatre.

2. Focus Group Discussion (60 to 90 minutes)

A focus group discussion, also conducted over Zoom, lasting approximately 60 to 90 minutes with a number of other Broadway music directors during which you will have a chance to discuss, with each other, the job of a Broadway music director, the pathway to becoming a music director and what it takes to keep working on Broadway.

If you are willing to participate, please let me know by responding to this email. I will then follow-up with you in order to determine a time that works for your busy schedule for the individual interview. You will also be asked to read and digitally sign an "informed consent" form prior to the interview.

If you have any questions about this research project or anything I have mentioned in this email, please let me know. I look forward to hearing from you!

Kind regards,

John Tarbet

Doctoral Candidate in Music and Music Education

Informed Consent Text

INFORMED CONSENT

INTRODUCTION

You are invited to participate in a research study entitled “Becoming a Broadway Music Director.” You may qualify to take part in this research study if you are over 18 years old and you have worked as the Music Director or Music Supervisor for a Broadway production in New York City. Approximately ten people will participate in this study. Participation in this study will take up approximately 2 to 3 hours of your time. This participation includes both an individual interview lasting 60 to 90 minutes in one sitting and a separate focus group discussion on a different day lasting 60 to 90 minutes.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?

The work of a Broadway music director is much more than simply conducting live performances from night to night. A music director wears many hats and has many responsibilities. This study will investigate the pathways that Broadway music directors have taken as they learned how to do the job and what it takes to maintain a career in professional theatre.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO IF I AGREE TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

If you decide to participate, you will consent to giving an individual interview and/or participate in a focus group discussion with other music directors. The primary researcher will individually interview you face-to-face using Zoom, an online video conferencing platform. Similarly, the focus group discussion will take place over Zoom. During the interview and/or the focus group discussion you will be asked about:

- Your work as a Broadway musical director
- The skills needed for your job
- Your background and training
- How you became a Broadway music director
- What you do to maintain a career as a music director
- Any challenges you have faced and overcome in your career

This interview and focus group discussions will be recorded (audio and video). Copies of the recordings will be stored in a secure online cloud platform (Teachers College Columbia University, TC Apps Platform). The spoken words from the interview and focus group discussion will be written down (transcribed). A copy of both the written interview and focus group transcripts will be shared with you.

You will be asked for permission to use your real name in the dissertation study. If you do not wish for your real name to be used, a pseudonym (fake name) will be used instead.

If you do not wish to be audio/video recorded, you will not be able to participate in this study. The interview will take approximately 60 to 90 minutes to complete. Likewise, the focus group discussion will take approximately 60 to 90 minutes to complete on a different day. All of these procedures will take place over zoom at a time that is convenient for you.

WHAT POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

This is a minimal risk study, which means the harms or discomforts that you may experience are not greater than you would ordinarily encounter in daily life. However, there are some risks to consider. For example, you might feel embarrassed to discuss problems or setbacks that you have experienced in your career. You do not have to answer any questions or share anything you do not want to talk about. You can stop participating in the study at any time without penalty.

Given the high-profile work of a Broadway music director, you are being asked to give permission for the use of your real name in this study. However, you can, at any time, request that your information be made confidential with the use of a pseudonym. All information from this study will be stored a secure online cloud platform (Teachers College Columbia University, TC Apps Platform).

If you request that a pseudonym be used, instead of your real name, the primary researcher will take precautions to keep your information confidential and prevent anyone from discovering or guessing your identity by keeping all information on a password protected computer and/or locked in a private office.

WHAT POSSIBLE BENEFITS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

There is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study. But, your participation might benefit the field of music and theatre education as this study might help educators better understand how to train aspiring music directors.

WILL I BE PAID FOR BEING IN THIS STUDY?

You will not be paid to participate. There are no costs to you for taking part in this study.

WHEN IS THE STUDY OVER? CAN I LEAVE THE STUDY BEFORE IT ENDS?

The study is over when you have completed the individual interview and the focus group discussion. However, you can leave the study at any time even if you have not finished.

PROTECTION OF YOUR CONFIDENTIALITY.

The primary researcher will keep all written materials in a locked office. Any electronic or digital information (including audio and video recordings) will be stored in a secure online cloud platform (Teachers College Columbia University, TC Apps Platform). If you request the use of a pseudonym, there will be no record matching your real name with your pseudonym.

For quality assurance, the study team, the study sponsor (grant agency), and/or members of the Teachers College Institutional Review Board (IRB) may review the data collected from you as part of this study. Otherwise, all information obtained from your participation in this study will be held strictly confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by U.S. or State law.

HOW WILL THE RESULTS BE USED?

This study is being conducted as part of the dissertation of the primary researcher. The results of this study will be published in journals and presented at academic conferences. Unless you give permission for the use of your real name, your identity will be removed from any data you provide before publication or use for educational purposes. Unless you give permission for the use of your real name, your name or any identifying information about you will not be published.

CONSENT FOR AUDIO AND OR VIDEO RECORDING

Audio and video recording is part of this research study. You can choose whether to give permission to be recorded. If you decide that you don't wish to be recorded you will not be able to participate in this research study.

I give my consent to be recorded _____
Signature

USE OF YOUR REAL NAME IN THIS STUDY

___ **I consent** to allow my real name to be used in this dissertation study, in educational settings or at a conference outside of Teachers College, Columbia University.

Signature: _____

___ **I do not consent** to allow my real name to be used in this dissertation study, in educational settings or at a conference outside of Teachers College, Columbia University.

Signature: _____

WHO MAY VIEW MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY

___ I consent to allow written, video and/or audio-recorded materials viewed at an educational setting or at a conference outside of Teachers College, Columbia University

Signature: _____

___ I do not consent to allow written, video and/or audio-recorded materials viewed outside of Teachers College, Columbia University

Signature: _____

OPTIONAL CONSENT FOR FUTURE CONTACT

The primary researcher may wish to contact you in the future. Please initial below to indicate whether or not you give permission for future contact.

The researcher may contact me in the future for other research opportunities:

Yes _____ Initial No _____ Initial

The researcher may contact me in the future for information relating to this current study:

Yes _____ Initial No _____ Initial

WHO CAN ANSWER MY QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS STUDY?

If you have any questions about taking part in this research study, you should contact the primary researcher, John Tarbet, at 801-573-9236 or at john.tarbet@tc.columbia.edu. You can also contact the faculty advisor, Dr. Lori Custodero at lac66@tc.columbia.edu.

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you should contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (the human research ethics committee) at 212-678-4105 or email IRB@tc.edu or you can write to the IRB at Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120th Street, New York, NY 10027, Box 151. The IRB is the committee that oversees human research protection for Teachers College, Columbia University.

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS

- I have read the Informed Consent Form and have been offered the opportunity to discuss the form with the researcher.
- I have had ample opportunity to ask questions about the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits regarding this research study.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw participation at any time without penalty.
- The researcher may withdraw me from the research at their professional discretion.
- If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available which may relate to my willingness to continue my participation, the researcher will provide this information to me.
- Any information derived from the research study that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.
- Identifiers may be removed from the data. De-identified data may be used for future research studies, or distributed to another researcher for future research without additional informed consent from you (the research participant or the research participant's representative).
- I should receive a copy of the Informed Consent Form document.

My signature means that I agree to participate in this study:

Print name: _____ Date: _____

Signature: _____