

THE MYTH OF THE “A-LIST” CREATIVE TEAM:
*Why Past Commercial Success Should Not Be a Factor in Putting Together the Creative
Team of a Broadway Musical*

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INTRODUCTION

Unequivocally, the most profitable properties on Broadway are also the riskiest and the most complex, that of new musicals. More than half of the longest running shows ever to play Broadway have been new productions of musicals with original scores. (Wikipedia.com, “List of Longest Running Broadway Shows”). New musicals have staying power, reach the widest audiences and permeate the larger culture outside of New York in ways that revivals and new plays rarely do. They cost the most to produce, but they also have the most profit and upside potential for their investors and the producers who bring them to life.

The conventional wisdom on Broadway tends to be that audiences are looking for something familiar and that in order to mitigate the enormous financial risks inherent in the production of shows on Broadway, producers should go with talent that has been already tested. The facts, however, show that this conventional wisdom is not only patently untrue, but also that ignoring it altogether and going with less established artists frequently yields more desirable results. The idea that, in order to give a show its best chance of becoming a hit, a creative team must be made up of A-List artists with successful commercial track records is a myth.

Perhaps counterintuitively, Producers do not find financial success by dipping into the same well of artists time and time again. On the contrary, commercial success, in the realm of new Broadway musicals, comes from the injection of new blood into the collaborative process in the form of artists that are new to the medium. This phenomenon has especially been the case in Broadway’s recent history. Until 2014, with Disney Theatrical’s live production of *Aladdin*, there had not been a single commercially

successfully new musical since 1989's *Grand Hotel* whose team of generative artists (i.e., the Director, Choreographer, Bookwriter, Lyricist and Composer) did not consist of at least one member for whom it was his or her first time working on a new Broadway musical (ibdb.com).¹

In contrast, the consistency of success within the live theatrical industry on Broadway does not come from the artists working within it, but instead from a small group of creative producers who assemble the artists (or find the material with a team intact for a transfer) on a project-by-project in order to nurture or find that success.

For the purposes of this paper, a new Broadway musical will be considered to be any piece of new musical theater with an original score, produced on Broadway with the intention of having an open-ended run. Limited engagements and musicals that are primarily dance musicals with no spoken or sung words in a theatrical story telling context (i.e.: *Contact*, *Movin' Out*, etc.) will not be included in the analysis of the data. If a production was considered a "new musical" in its Tony eligibility we will consider it new here. Similarly, if the musical was eligible for a Tony award for Best Original Score, we will consider the musical to have an original score, regardless of whether some songs appeared in other media prior to its theatrical adaptation.² In addition, an "original musical" shall mean a musical with an original score, without referring to whether the musical is based on some kind of underlying material, or whether the story is an original one. Lastly, in defining the success of a new Broadway musical, this paper will look only at the commercial and financial success of the Broadway production. The terms

¹ As not all Broadway show's disclose in the press whether they become profitable or not, there may be additional outliers in that period, but the point still stands that, from 1988-2014, the vast majority of creative teams on profitable new book musicals had at least one non-veteran among them.

² *The Lion King*, for example, whereas *American Idiot*, will not be considered in the data.

“Success” and “Successful” shall not mean critical or artistic success (though that in no way is meant to imply that those accomplishments are in significant). If the musical recouped its initial investment in its original Broadway run, it will be considered, for the purposes of this analysis, to be “successful.”

All data as to which individuals had which credits on any particular Broadway show is taken from the Internet Broadway Database (ibdb.com), which is a database of all the shows to play on Broadway that is maintained by the Broadway League (the “League”), the trade organization for the Broadway industry, “dedicated to fostering increased interest in Broadway theatre and supporting the creation of profitable theatrical productions.” (Broadway.org). The opening night credits are taken from the opening night Playbills and verified by the League.

In exploring the phenomenon of the myth of established artists being a safer choice and giving a show a greater chance of success, we will first look at first the history of the form, showing that prior to the 1990s there was a small and insular group of artists that drove the success engine of new Broadway musicals, with more frequent and consistent success. We will examine this earlier period by delving into an exhaustive quantitative study produced in 2005. Then, in an effort to explore the recent history and the counterintuitive and unusual fact that all profitable new Broadway musicals in the period examined had new blood on the creative team, the paper will explore the factual realities of the current and more recent landscape of new Broadway musicals, examining the track records of commercial success of producers, directors, choreographers and writers in the period between *Grand Hotel* and *Aladdin*.

The paper will also look at instances in which producers dipped into the same creative well and were not successful, as well as examine the careers of some of the most successful producers of new Broadway musicals in recent years, looking for suggestions as far as how to approach the creation of creative teams for new musicals, without using commercial track record as the primary benchmark. Finally, we will explore some of the reasons why working with new talent is often preferable in creating a successful commercial Broadway product.

CHAPTER 1: It was a Small, Small World.

One of the main reasons that the realities of repeat successes on Broadway amongst artists are counter-intuitive is that it is a relatively recent phenomenon, owing to changes in the landscape of the industry over the past couple of decades. During the “golden age” of musical theater it simply was not the case.

The current situation runs counter to the successes of Broadway musicals of the earlier part of the 20th century. During that time, musicals were being presented with more frequency and the same artists worked together time and time again. In fact, throughout the bulk of the 20th century, the Broadway musical industry was so insular and the collaborations amongst artists were repeated with such regularity that the nature of the collaboration of creative teams of Broadway musicals was deemed a perfect candidate to serve as a sociological test case for what happens in small and insular groups of collaborators.

In 2005, Brian Uzzi of Northwestern University and Jarrett Spiro of Stanford University published a study in the *American Journal of Sociology* entitled “Collaboration and Creativity: The Small World Problem” that aimed to highlight the effectiveness of collaboration in small world networks, using Broadway musicals from 1945-1989 as their case study and proof of concept. The term “small world network” as used in their paper refers to:

a type of mathematical graph in which most nodes are not neighbors of one another, but most nodes can be reached from every other by a small number of hops or steps. (Wikipedia.com “ Small-World Networks”).

In sociological terms this refers to a social network where individuals who are strangers are linked through one degree of separation by mutual acquaintances. The study's aim is to show the benefits and the pitfalls of small world networks, by postulating that success that is dependent upon creative collaboration (as any Broadway musical most decidedly is) is best served when the small network is of a moderate size. When too few people in the collaboration are part of the same network, the collaboration ceases to benefit from the comfortability and shared conventions of the small network. Conversely on the other side of the u-shaped curve, the writers postulate that when the network becomes too insular there is not enough room for innovation. The study examined the core creative collaborative team of a musical, director, choreographer, producer, composer, lyricist and librettist ("bookwriter"). (Uzzi, Spiro).

During the period explored in the study, creative teams and individual artists were the driving forces and commonalities in successful Broadway Musicals. (Often times these creatives were the producers themselves, Hal Prince, Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II, for example). Personalities such as Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II, Bob Fosse, Michael Bennett, Gower Champion, Tommy Tune, Leonard Bernstein, Stephen Sondheim, Betty Comden and Adolph Green, Hal Prince, Trevor Nunn and Andrew Lloyd Webber all had multiple hit musicals over relatively short periods of time. If we look at the work of some of those artists in roughly decade long chunks, many had at least 3 hits within the span of 10 years at one point in time or another, and wildly prolific careers beyond that.

Artist	1st Successful Show/ year	2nd	3rd	4th	Years Between Them
Rodgers and Hammerstein	Oklahoma, 1943	Carousel, 1945	South Pacific, 1949	The King and I, 1951	4 in 8
Bob Fosse	The Pajama Game, 1954	Damn Yankees, 1955	Bells are Ringing, 1956	How to Succeed, 1961	4 in 7
Jule Styne	Bells are Ringing, 1956	Gypsy, 1959	Funny Girl, 1964		3 in 8
Jerome Robbins	Bells are Ringing, 1956	West Side Story, 1957	Gypsy, 1959	Forum...1962	4 in 6
Stephen Sondheim	West Side Story, 1957	Gypsy, 1959	...Forum, 1962	Company, 1970	4 in 13, 3 in 9
Hal Prince	Cabaret, 1966	Company, 1970	A Little Night Music, 1973	Evita, 1979	4 in 13, 3 in 7
Michael Bennett	Promises, Promises, 1966	Company, 1970	A Chorus Line, 1976	Dreamgirls, 1981	4 in 15, 2 in 4, 2 in 5
Tommy Tune	Best Little Whorehouse..., 1982	Nine, 1982	My One and Only, 1983	Grand Hotel, 1989	4 in 7, 3 in 2
Trevor Nunn	Cats, 1982	Les Misérables, 1987	Starlight Express, 1987		3 in 5
Andrew Lloyd Webber	Cats, 1982	Song & Dance, 1985	Starlight Express, 1987	Phantom, 1988	4 in 6

As the examples above demonstrate, from the 1940s through the 1980s there were several widely known and recognized artists with multiple hits on new musicals in very short succession. These luminaries collaborated with one another frequently and though they had their share of failures, they also kept having successes working together, and this is why a group of sociologists would want to look at the field as a case study for the exploration of small world theory in the first place.

When I sat out to explore this topic, I came in with the same assumptions as I suspect many do, that there are many artists that have had multiple repeat successes within the industry. That there exists a group of top “Broadway” writers and directors and choreographers and that producers tend to dip into the same well in putting together their creative teams for that very reason, keeping an insular group of insider artists working together with frequency in the hopes that their collective creative collaboration will result in a repeat of an earlier success. In other words, operating as if the “small network” of Broadway artists referred to by Spiro and Uzzi still exists and functions in the way it did from the 1940s through the 1980s, the time period of their study.

The last bit of the conclusion in the study is what led me to explore what happened after the period in which the study was conducted. It felt instinctively true to me that new Broadway musicals were being produced using the same artists over and over again. However, after examining closely all the shows that were produced in the period after the study, I began to notice that there was a stark change in the pattern of repeat successes since the 1990s that was quite different from the pattern during the period explored in the study.

While it continued to be true that many artists and producers were continuing to work together, they were not working together on multiple *hit* shows any longer. I also was surprised to see how many people *were* working on hit shows that had not ever worked on Broadway musicals before.

It seems that, coincidentally, right after the end of that period explored by Uzzi and Spiro, where Broadway was so insular, with artists working together on hit shows at high enough frequencies that the industry could be used as a case study for small world theory, the industry entered into some sort of transition phase when it came to Broadway musicals, and new original musicals in particular. Some of this could be attributed to a major shift in the landscape of the industry that began during the 1980s, but of which we did not start to see the effects until the 1990s. In understanding the shift, we must explore the current landscape of the original musical on Broadway.

CHAPTER 2: The Current Landscape of the Original Broadway Musical.

With the rise of British mega-musicals in the 1980s, musicals began to cost more to produce than ever before. Along with those increasing costs, the audience's expectation of spectacle and higher level of production values also increased. Yet, even with these increases, it was the same small percentage of shows in any given season that recouped their investment. Because of these higher costs, the only way to recoup the increased capital is to strive for a longer running show:

It's a perennial Broadway truth that only 20%-30% of shows pay back their investors.

The percentages really haven't changed much over the last 60 years," [Broadway League Executive Director Charlotte] St. Martin says.

And of those that do recoup, many just barely do so. History shows that only two or three shows a year make the really big money. The producing game has always been to try and snag one of those rare blockbusters — "The Book of Mormon" being the most recent example.

So what has changed? Obviously, the cost of entry into the game has ballooned. And, notes "Wicked" producer David Stone, "shows just run longer than used to be the case."

The touring market has also changed. Back in the so-called Golden Age, hits would tour and second-tier shows would quietly close. Now, there's a touring market for such mid-range shows as "American Idiot" (which did not fully recoup on Broadway), so more money can be made on the back

end. Thus, there's more of an incentive in keeping the Broadway flagship flying. If a show closes early, it signals a flop.

Of course, producers often have a tough time explaining to their investors why a show that has been running for 500-plus performances has yet to cover its initial costs.

But that's Broadway. These days, plugging away is not necessarily a matter of vanity. It's financially better in most cases to play on and build the brand. (Jones, *Variety*).

When facing down these rising costs, and working to build a product that can be an enduring brand, it is only natural to seek out tested and true creative commodities, artists that have delivered blockbuster Broadway shows with mass appeal in the hope that they will continue to create product with a wide reach.

So success does not happen except to 20-30% of the new shows on Broadway, but it stands to reason that (and is patently obvious to anyone walking through Times Square) the industry does turn out hits from time to time. So if the instinct based on past practice and risk reduction is to mount productions with tried and true tested players that are part of that middle sized network akin to what was present in the 1940s through the 1980s, I needed to examine how that was playing out in the patterns of successful new musicals over the past 25 years since the completion of that study. The following chart lists all of the new original Broadway musicals that have recouped in the period from *Grand Hotel* through *Aladdin*, along with a list of the members of the core artistic team that had never before worked on a new original Broadway musical:

PROFITABLE NEW ORIGINAL BROADWAY MUSICALS SINCE 1989³**Show Title Year Members of Team New to Broadway Musicals**

Grand Hotel	1989	All veteran
City of Angels	1989	Director, Some Lyrics, Choreography
Miss Saigon	1991	Director, Book
Tommy ⁴	1993	Music, Lyrics, book
Falsettos	1993	Music, Lyrics, Book
Beauty and The Beast	1994	Director, Music, Book, choreography
Rent	1996	All
The Lion King	1997	Director, Music, Book, Choreography
Aida	2000	Director, some Book
The Full Monty	2000	Music, Lyrics
The Producers	2001	Director, Music, Lyrics
Urinetown	2001	all
Hairspray	2002	Music, Lyrics, one half of Book
Wicked	2003	Director, Book
Avenue Q	2003	all
Spamalot	2005	Music, Lyrics, Book
Spelling Bee	2005	Book, Choreography
The Color Purple	2005	Director, music, lyrics, Choreographer
Mary Poppins	2006	Director, some Music, some Lyrics, Book, Choreography
Spring Awakening	2006	Music, Lyrics, Book, Choreography
Drowsy Chaperone	2006	Director, Music, Lyrics, Book
In the Heights	2008	Director, Music, Lyrics, Book
Next to Normal	2009	Music, Lyrics, Book
Billy Elliott	2009	Director, Lyrics, Book, Choreographer
Memphis	2010	Music, some lyrics,
Book of Mormon	2011	Director, some Music, Lyrics, Book,
Once	2012	Director, Music, Lyrics, Book
Newsies	2012	Lyrics
Kinky Boots	2013	Music, Lyrics,
Matilda	2013	Music, Lyrics, Book.
Aladdin	2014	All veteran

³ See section: "Online Articles Proving Recoupment" for back-up data.

⁴ Tommy's score was Tony eligible and so the show is included even though some might argue that it is a jukebox musical.

The results of my research on these shows were astonishing to me. As I stated at the start of this paper, Broadway has been in a period from the opening of *Grand Hotel* through 2014's *Aladdin* in which not a single new original musical with a creative team made up entirely of veterans was profitable. Some shows that were profitable even had creative teams that were entirely new to the mounting of an original musical on Broadway. In the past ten years alone there have been 3 financial successes with totally new teams, and 8 with only one veteran on the core creative team, while there have been no financially successful original musicals mounted on Broadway with creative teams of all veterans until *Aladdin*.

In addition to the dearth of financially successful shows with all veteran creative teams, the data also shows that the majority of the financially successful musicals during this period occurred from the year 2000 on. This is likely due to a large decline in the number of new musicals being mounted on Broadway during the 1990s, in favor of a large wave of successful revival productions of golden age musicals from the 1940s through 1960s. As Professor Nathan Hurwitz notes in *A History of the American Musical Theater*:

The number of new musicals mounted from 1993-2001 dropped to an all time low...the 1994-1995 season was the worst of all, with only two new musicals...during this decade it was occasionally hard for the Tony nominating committee to come up with enough nominees in some categories.(Hurwitz 224).

Rising costs, longer runs and fewer theaters have contributed to fewer productions, though as we will see in the following pages, there are still a number of prolific artists working on Broadway, they just do not have consistent commercial track records. This trend has yet to be understood and embraced by the industry as producers continue to go back to many of the same artists time and again, despite the fact that it is rarely resulting in repeat success. One might assume that, due to the decrease in the number of shows produced, artists are less prolific than they were in the preceding period. This assumption is true to a certain degree, but there are still a number of artists who have worked on multiple new original Broadway musicals during the period from 1989-2014.

CHAPTER 3. The State of the Artist in Working on Broadway Musicals.

The fact that there is rare repeat success from artists working on new original Broadway musicals, does not mean that producers do not dip into the same well with frequency. It is merely that this frequency does not result in repeated commercial success on Broadway for these individual artists. When we break out the track record of individual creative team members, we see that the frequency with which accomplished artists repeat commercial success with original musicals is wanting at best. Appendix A lists the most prolific directors, writers and choreographers of original musicals during the period since *Grand Hotel*. The listing includes any director, writer and choreographer with three or more outings on a new Broadway musical, along with a record of their commercial successes and failures.

The sheer number of veteran writers, choreographers and directors working on multiple shows during the past twenty-five years makes it abundantly clear that the industry continues to look to its veterans, despite a particular veteran's track record for commercial success. From 1989-2014 there have been 16 Directors, 18 writers, and 16 Choreographers that have filled the same role on at least three new original Broadway musicals.

However, more and more shows are bringing in talent that have never worked in the medium before, challenging the assumption that the world of Broadway musicals is still in fact closed and insular as it was in the period examined by Spiro and Uzzi. In fact, when the industry attempts to remain the way that it was during the period examined

by the study, it would seem that it largely results in commercial failure rather than success.

The frequency of success for individual Broadway musical artists has decreased exponentially. Writers and Directors have repeated commercial success on a very infrequent basis, and when they do, the time between those successes rarely comes in close succession. There are even several notable artists who have worked on three or more shows that have had no commercial success whatsoever from 1989-2014, six directors, nine writers, and five choreographers in point-of-fact. This trend of an expansion of time between working on hit shows and a decrease in the frequency of commercial success appears to be increasing as we progress further into the 21st century.

Since September 11, 2001, only a few generative artists have worked on more than one profitable new original Broadway musical. They are writer Robert Lopez (*Avenue Q* and *The Book of Mormon*), Director/Choreographer Casey Nicholaw (*Spamalot*, *The Drowsy Chaperone* and *The Book of Mormon*) and Choreographer Sergio Trujillo (*Next to Normal* and *Memphis*). Go back to 2000 and we can only add Jack O'Brien (*The Full Monty* and *Hairspray*), Elton John (*Aida* and *Billy Elliott*), and Jerry Mitchell (*The Full Monty* and *Hairspray*) to this short list. *Aladdin* and *Kinky Boots* recently announced Recoupment, which would allow us to add Harvey Fierstein (*Newsies* and *Kinky Boots*), Alan Menken (*Aladdin* and *Newsies*) and Tim Rice (*Aida* and *Aladdin*). That is nine artists in the past fifteen years that have worked on more than one profitable original musical on Broadway, and only 3 that have had more than one success in the past decade.

If we go back all the way to 1989 (post *Grand Hotel*), we can add Director Michael Greif for *Next to Normal* and *Rent*, Lyricist Tim Rice for *Beauty and the Beast*, *Aida* and *The Lion King*, and Bookwriter Linda Woolverton for *Beauty and the Beast* and *Aida*. Both Alan Menken and Elton John each get one more hit in their column for *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Lion King* respectively, making them along with Tim Rice, Casey Nicholaw and Jerry Mitchell (as choreographer of *The Full Monty*, *Hairspray* and *Kinky Boots*, thus far Mitchell has only had one financial success as a director) the only artists that have had three or more hits in the same job on a new musical since 1989.

This is in stark contrast to the myriad examples from the 1940s through 1980s when several artists had three or more financial successes in as short a period as 5 years. It also comes nowhere near to the percentage of shows that are profitable each season.

Though the thrust of this paper deals in the realm of the new original musical, if we examine in this discussion of artists working on Broadway musicals overall, including jukebox musicals and revivals, the overall success rate does not improve by much. Including such productions, we cannot add many names to the “since 2000” list of artists with repeat commercial successes. If we were to include new musicals with scores taken from pre-existing material, we could add one more hit to Sergio Trujillo’s column for *Jersey Boys*, along with a second for Des McAnuff. Taking into account revivals of musicals, we could include Director/Choreographer Rob Ashford for the revivals of *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* and *Promises, Promises*, Director Diane Paulus for *Pippin* and *Hair*, and Composer Stephen Schwartz for *Wicked* and *Pippin*. Though it would be hard to argue that Schwartz truly “worked” on *Pippin*, and neither

Paulus nor Ashford has had any new original Broadway musicals they have worked on become profitable on Broadway to date.

Contrast the low number of repeat successes with the number of artists who have been involved in more than three original musicals from 1989-2014. The point is that lightning rarely, if ever, strikes twice in the current climate, and if it does, it does not typically come again in short succession. Despite this, the high-risk nature of mounting a Broadway musical sometimes makes financing a show with untested talent difficult. In order to capitalize a show, independent producers' investors often expect a seasoned team. This expectation, if followed, rarely bares fruit, and certainly does not mitigate risk better than any other choices a producer could make.

Oftentimes, trying to capture the same magic a second time results in total financial disaster. There are high profile examples (which we will explore in subsequent chapters) of productions that have been mounted with largely the same creative teams as an earlier highly successful show. These often open with great anticipation amongst the investment and industry community and in the public, only to debut to lackluster critical and commercial success.

Conventional wisdom amongst the investor and producer set is that the single most important factor in building a creative team, in terms of commercial success, is getting the right director. This sometimes has to do with investor expectation, so the investors in the production feel that the show is in capable and experienced hands. It's often one of the first questions an investor will ask. On its surface this seems quite reasonable and, at one point, this argument may have held water, as there was a period in

the 1970s and 1980s when major directors did have a series of massive hits working on new original musicals in quick succession.

Trevor Nunn had two massive hits in less than a decade with *Cats* and *Les Miserables*. Hal Prince, even with a string of flops in the 1980s still got to both *Evita* and *Phantom of the Opera* in less than 10 years. Tommy Tune had *Nine* and *Grand Hotel* in the 1980s. Michael Bennett had *A Chorus Line* and *Dreamgirls* in less than 10 years as well. (ibdb.com).

But, as the data shows, in the last 25 years there have been few directors with multiple hits at the helm of new original musicals. For some, the span between those multiple successes has greatly increased. In addition to Jack O'Brien and Casey Nicholaw, who have had hits within a span of only a few years, only James Lapine and Michael Greif also had two profitable musicals during this period, and their shows⁵ both opened 13 years apart from each other.

As longer runs are frequently needed with large musicals to ensure financial success, simple profitability (recoupment) is not the only measure of success in the current environment, nor is it the goal for most Broadway productions. When the length of the run of a new original Broadway musical is taken into account, the consistency of success amongst Broadway directors decreases even further.

There have been 13 original musicals that have opened since the year 2000 that have lasted more than 1000 performances on Broadway. Of these 13, only three were directed by seasoned directors of Broadway musicals and none of these 13 was directed by the same individual. During the entire 25 year period since *Grand Hotel* only one

⁵ *Falsettos* and *The 25th Annual Putman County Spelling Bee* for Lapine, and *Rent* and *Next to Normal* for Greif.

director has had more than one new original musical that has lasted more than 1000 performances, Julie Taymor, and her second show to hit that benchmark, *Spider-Man: Turn Off the Dark*, did not come close to recouping its investment despite its run of 1,066 performances.

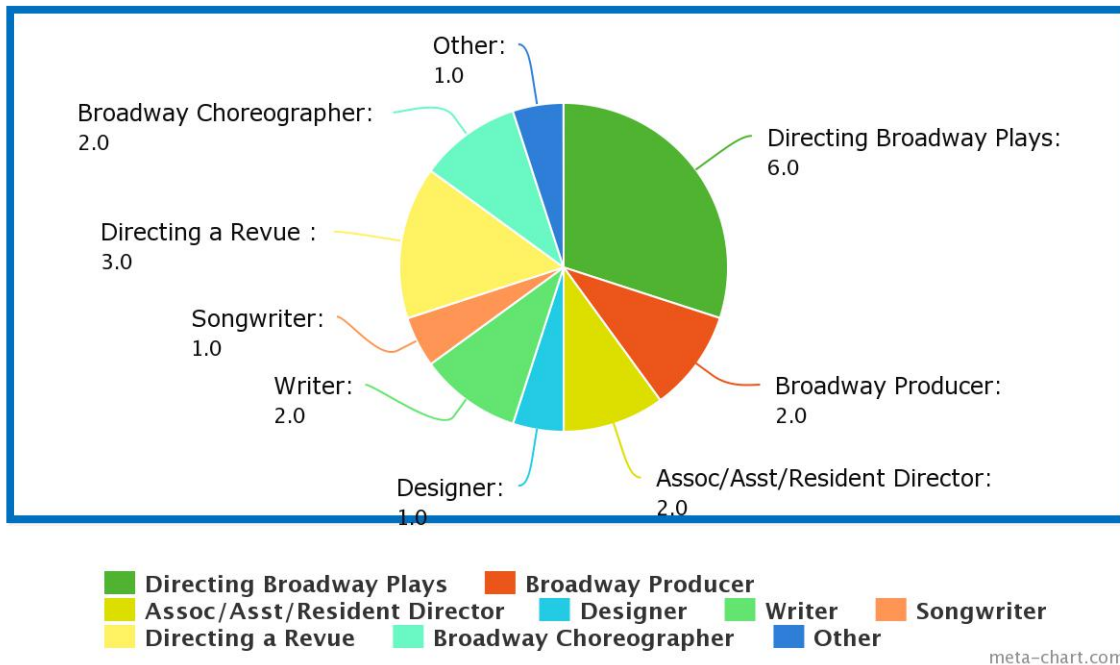
In total, of all the 32 new original musicals that were profitable since *Grand Hotel*, only eight were helmed by directors with any kind of previous experience directing new musicals on Broadway. One might assume that those eight worked on the 13 musicals with over a thousand performances, but in truth only four of the directors of those 13 shows had directed new original musicals on Broadway before, and only two of those had directed more modest hits prior to directing the long-running success.⁶

So if the majority of shows that are successful are helmed by those directors who have not directed a new Broadway musical before, where are they coming from? Where are these artists cutting their teeth? Many have worked on Broadway in some other capacity or in a different medium than a new original musical. The following chart shows the number of artists who worked on successful original Broadway musicals with previous Broadway experience, what other Broadway projects they had worked on and in what capacity.

⁶ Jack O'Brien with *The Full Monty* and *Hairspray*, Casey Nicholaw for *Drowsy Chaperone* and *The Book of Mormon*.

First Time Broadway Musical Directors' previous Broadway experiences

Source: ibdb.com



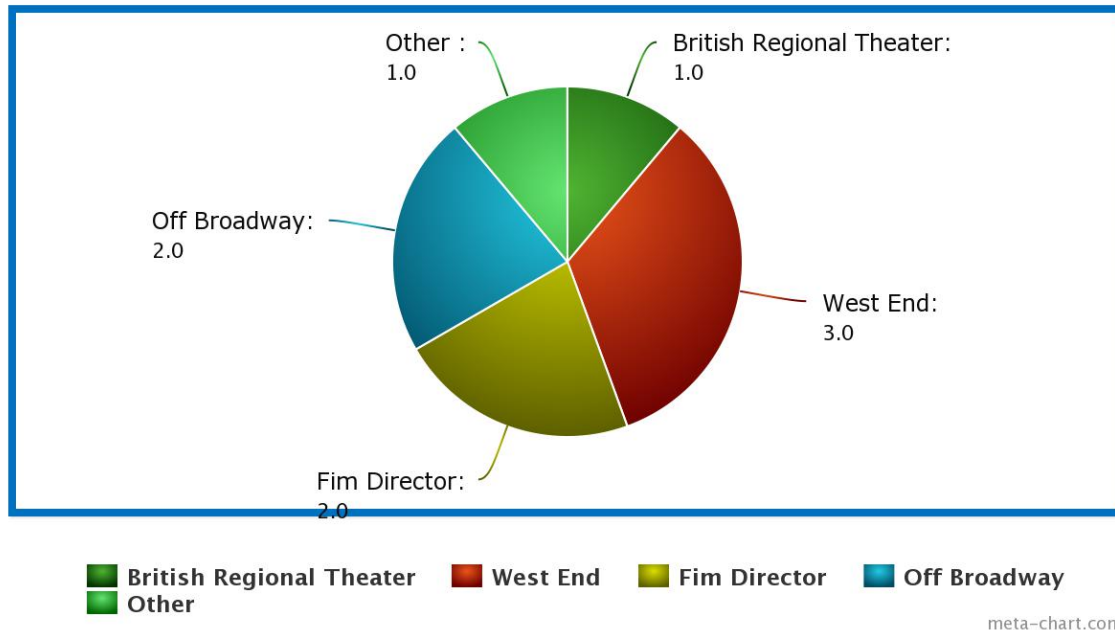
It is interesting to note that the categories with the highest numbers here are from seasoned Broadway directors who just have not worked on a Broadway *musical* before. The next highest number come from artists that have worked in close proximity to seasoned directors on musicals as their associates or as the choreographer, or in directing a musical revue, giving them an understanding of the creative process as it specifically pertains to the demands of the Broadway work environment.

None of the directors that had success on their first attempt with a new Broadway musical had had previous experience directing a *revival* of a musical or a jukebox musical, and so, all first time directors of new Broadway musicals who ended up having a hit were not just making their directorial debut on a new original musical, they were making their debut as a director of *any* kind of Broadway musical.

Sometimes the first time directors of successful new Broadway musicals come from outside the Broadway sphere entirely as illustrated in the following chart:

Where Broadway Directors of musical making their Broadway debut came from prior to their first Broadway Production

Source: ibdb.com



The key take away from this data is that, while the majority of the financially successful shows from *Grand Hotel* through *Aladdin* have had a director with no experience directing new original Broadway musicals, most have had a director that has had some experience or at least exposure in the Broadway sphere, which can help them in dealing with those pressures. This fact, however, is not the case with writing teams.

Twenty-one of the 31 successful shows (67.7%) from this period had at least one writer on the team who was making his or her Broadway debut. Oftentimes this was in collaboration with writers who have worked on Broadway before, sometimes successfully. Again, it is not to say that all these writers were untested commodities. Alan Menken had already won an Oscar and had a hugely successful Off-Broadway musical when he made his Broadway debut with *Beauty and the Beast*. Shows like *Memphis*,

Kinky Boots, *The Lion King*, *Spring Awakening* and *Tommy* were written by successful songwriters from the recording industry. *The Book of Mormon* was written by the writers of “South Park.” The key is matching the right artist with the right project.

It is not necessarily an indictment of the artist’s creative abilities generally or his or her artistic success on a particular project, that he or she is unable to recreate a high level of commercial success multiple times. It would seem, given the evidence, that due to shifting audience tastes, high costs and the need for longer running shows, it may be impossible for an artist to recreate that level of success with any sort of regularity, especially in quick succession. All of the foregoing then begs the question: why do Broadway producers of new musicals think that a director is ever capable of having a second large hit?

Indeed, it is neither the responsibility nor within the purview of the artist to worry about such matters as he or she creates the creative product. Oftentimes financial failures are critical successes, sometimes with an afterlife beyond Broadway, and many of the artists on the above lists are award winning and critically-acclaimed. This is especially true in Broadway’s for profit, producer-driven marketplace, where the director is often hired as part of a team after the project has already been conceived, and writing teams are put together to adapt existing intellectual property owned or licensed and optioned by commercial producers. The responsibility for matching the right team with the right project in these situations rests with another key member of the creative team, the creative producer.

Chapter 4. Creative Producers

In an interview with the American Theater Wing, Hal Prince, one of the great creative producers of the mid-20th century, bemoaned the state of creative producing and how the industry has changed since the height of his producing career:

Creative Producers have been driven out of the theater. [Why do I think so?] Because I was a creative producer. Because I wouldn't know how to raise money standing on my head stark naked in Times Square. All I had to do was raise a little bit of money from a lot of loving people who adored the theatre. There are fewer of those, and I could not come up with ten million dollars today, with my reputation, not remotely. And I wouldn't know how to go about doing that because I wouldn't want to make the moves you have to make to get that kind of money. The costs have driven the right people out. Now there are exceptions, but we're not here to talk about exceptions. (Long 25).

Prince is right to an extent, but the exceptions he speaks of just so happen to currently be the major driving forces of new musical development and successful original Broadway musicals. Further to that, those exceptions are one of the few individuals on the creative side of the industry that have any kind of a consistent track record with multiple hit shows.

As we have seen, repeat commercial success does not return to theater artists on the Broadway stage when working on new original musicals with any frequency.

However, there are a number of leading Broadway producers who develop new original musicals who do have frequent financial success, whose batting average is better than the average rate of success on Broadway.

Take, for example, two of the most prolific of these producers of the past 20 years: Disney Theatrical Productions, headed by Thomas Schumacher, and what was once The Producing Office, which consisted of Kevin McCollum and Jeffrey Seller, later adding Robyn Goodman. (Recently these three have dissolved their partnership and each has struck out on his or her own).

In appendices B and C, I have included charts that detail the various productions that the two organizations have produced, their financial successes and failures, as well as details as to the artists that they worked with for the first time and on subsequent occasions

Through Disney, Schumacher has to date produced seven new original musicals on Broadway, five of which have been commercial successes during their Broadway runs. Kevin McCollum and the Producing Office have produced six (five with Seller, and four with Seller and Goodman), four of which have been profitable.

Tellingly, these producers rarely return to the same creative teams. Though they may (and often do) work with the same artists again on a new project, it has never been with entirely the same creative team. These producers also frequently engage with artists from outside the Broadway sphere and with artists who have no previous experience working on a Broadway musical.

Five of the Disney shows had directors making their Broadway musical directorial debut (three of those were profitable). Disney has yet to re-hire a director or

bookwriter for a second Broadway musical. Five of the McCollum productions employed new Broadway musical directors, and the one that did not happens to be the one with the shortest run of all their productions. Three of their productions had entire creative teams that had never worked on Broadway in any capacity. Two of those were profitable. *The Drowsy Chaperone*, produced by McCollum without Seller and Goodman, had a writing team making its Broadway debut under a Broadway choreographer who was directing for the first time.

It would be easy to dismiss this track record by claiming that Disney's shows are based on very well-known and branded commodities, however, Broadway is littered with financial flops based upon similar titles that have arguable "brands" to them: *The Addams Family*, *The Bridges of Madison County*, *Shrek* and *Spider-Man: Turn Off the Dark* .to name a few. One could argue that none of those shows were musicals in their original form, but Disney Theatrical has had one of those, with *The Little Mermaid*, a financial failure on Broadway, of this kind.

There have also been a string of flops based on hit films that have name recognition, whose "brand" is not a multi-media franchise: *Ghost*, *Catch Me If You Can*, *Sister Act*, *Legally Blonde* and *Rocky*, to name a few recent examples.

Further to all of the above, none of the new original musicals produced by Kevin McCollum and the Producing Office that have been successful have had any kind of brand recognition whatsoever. Most were essentially new material. The only time the group produced something based on a film with even a mild following was *High Fidelity*, which to date has been their least successful production.

One of Disney's successes, *Aida*, was loosely based on the Verdi Opera, hardly a household name amongst a large swath of the Broadway theater-going public. All of this should put to rest the notion that Schumacher and Disney's successes have hinged solely on the name recognition and brand of their productions.

Though Schumacher and McCollum (with and without his partners at the Producing Office) are great case studies of Creative Producers being a consistent through-line to success, they are not the only examples. Another prominent Broadway producer, David Stone, has been the producer of four new original musicals, three of which have been profitable. Each of those three had one or more core creative team members who were making their Broadway musical debut in their job on the show. Stone, McCollum and Schumacher together are responsible for nearly one half of the hit new Broadway musicals since the year 2000 (10 out of 22).

The conclusion cannot be clearly drawn, nor is it likely, that these producers and others like them are necessarily aware that they were (or were actively trying to be) selecting new talent as they moved forward with producing their shows. What is likelier when comparing their success rates to the overall success rates during this recent period, coupled with the relative greenness of their creative teams, is that these producers were looking more at the particular artist's aesthetic and fit for the project, or in the case of some of the Producing Office's shows, a willingness to keep a creative team that was untested commercially together when transferring a production to a larger audience. Jeffrey Seller, in a recent New York Times article about an ill-fated musical in development said of his shows:

My most successful musicals were singularly driven by their creators, not by me,” said Jeffrey Seller, the producer of Tony Winners like “Rent” and “In the Heights” (and this season’s “The Last Ship,” which is closing Jan. 24). “It was the producer David Merrick’s idea to turn ‘The Matchmaker’ into ‘Hello, Dolly!,’ but it’s far more often the artists who start with the best ideas. Producers can help keep them focused and help fight the biggest enemy to making musicals — the multitasking that all of us do now. (Healy).

The only logical conclusion to draw is that, for these producers, aesthetic and the artist’s creative sensibilities, their own ideas and past development on a particular project that intrigued the producer and critical track record in other mediums (Non-Profit or Off-Broadway theater, for example) trumped the need for a Broadway track record, and as we have seen, for these producers that philosophy has mostly paid off.

In an interview about the development of the stage version of THE LION KING in an article about Julie Taymor written for *The New Yorker*, Thomas Schumacher corroborates this sentiment in discussing the decidedly (at the time) outside the box selection of Julie Taymor as the show’s director. It should be noted that the quoted article was written in 1996, before THE LION KING had opened and before anyone knew how successful it would be either artistically or financially:

“When we started to look at the Lion King I couldn’t think of how to do it, so I called her [Julie Taymor] up...Her first reaction was ‘Why her?’ he recalls, ‘But really when you look at Julie’s work, she deals with mythic materials, legends, stories that have something deeper in their roots, and

then she literally finds fantastic ways of telling them. *The Lion King* is mythic at its core—it's about this kid who has to find out who he is' (Kaplan, *The New Yorker*).

In later interviews, Schumacher describes the thinking in hiring Taymor, much the same way for a Q and A on Disney's fanclub site 15 years later:

You don't really know whether something is going to work or not. I felt very strongly that Julie Taymor would know how to handle the material and her genuine genius—and there's not that much genuine genius in the world today—but her genuine genius had the potential to create something wonderful, but we didn't know. You can't ask people what they want to see because they will simply tell you about something that is like the last good thing they saw. Until you've had salted caramel, you don't understand that it's delicious. (d23.com).

David Stone has expressed similar sentiments in discussing the projects he decides to get involved with:

Anytime I've produced anything, thinking, *You know what? This is going to work. This is going to make money. I'm going to do this because....* It's never worked. And anytime I've said *I just love this. I don't care if it works, I love it.* It always has. (Long 24).

These successful creative producers have hit upon one of the keys to success with new original musicals on Broadway: An artist's commercial track record on Broadway is

immaterial, that kind of success cannot be duplicated. The artist must be evaluated holistically from the body of their work in their field, even across other mediums. What is their understanding of the material? How does their vision align with the rest of the prospective team and with the producer's own vision of the production? The alchemy of a creative team is tied to the project at hand.

The commercial success of a new original Broadway musical is impossible to predict. It either will work or it will not; if the right choice seems to be risky on the surface, but the artist's aesthetic, style and body of work inform that they are the right choice, it may actually and counterintuitively be the less risky choice.

There are ways to mitigate the risk of a new artist being in unfamiliar territory. Pair a green director with seasoned stage management, production management or a design team that has been around the block a few times. Match new writers with directors who have developed shows before. The producers discussed in this chapter are all examples of this strategy, their experience likely balances out the newer teams they hire. They are not afraid to hire artists that are lesser-known but perhaps poised to break out.

Chapter 5. The Benefits of the B, C and D-list.

So if artists are not having repeat successes on new original Broadway musicals, and producers are, the disconnect must lie with producers in the selection of the creative teams, and the projects they pick to produce. In putting together a producer-driven musical with Broadway aspirations, financial pressures and other risk factors may lead a producer to believe that going after the best A-list talent that is available is the way to go, when in actuality they may be far better served in exploring up-and-coming talent.

Beyond the matching of artistic sensibility to the project, there are a number of other reasons that hiring a less experienced (to Broadway at least) creative team may increase the likelihood of success, or at least in many cases may be a better choice, while going with the most successful players can be fraught.

Artists of a certain success level are often working on multiple projects and often do not have the bandwidth for long periods of development time. Producer Sue Frost, who was the lead producer of the Tony award winning (and financially successful) musical *Memphis*, and who previously developed new musicals at the Goodspeed Opera House describes the pitfalls that can happen when working with a more “A-list” creative team in the development of a new high profile commercially bound project:

There’s so much more risk and expense involved that there’s all those levels of development. I mean, there are certainly people who have had a certain level of success that can push stuff forward faster. But I think a perfect example of where that goes wrong: look at what happened in London with *From Here to Eternity* and *Stephen Ward*. Those were two

shows that because the writers were of such status and probably, to a certain extent, the directors, the team, they didn't want to go out of town and work on the show, they didn't want to do that subsidized theater, they just want to do a show and neither of those shows were fully baked. They just weren't fully cooked...

From Here to Eternity is a perfect example of a show that, with a couple of other productions, it should have been a really good show. But it didn't have a chance so it opens like that on the West End [and] it's done. But that's because the people are at such a level they don't go through those steps.

Consider the success of *The Producers* and the failure shortly thereafter of *Young Frankenstein*, two shows with a nearly identical creative team produced only 6 years apart. Mel Brooks' *The Producers* was the first mega-hit of the 21st century, wildly anticipated, with an A-list cast and a creative team of both fresh and experienced Broadway artists (*Annie*'s Thomas Meehan was tapped to adapt the film for the show's book). It marked hugely successful Broadway choreographer Susan Stroman's directorial debut⁷ on Broadway with an original score by (Broadway neophyte) Brooks himself. The show was a commercial and critical hit, breaking records both at the box office and for the number of Tony Awards it took home. (Pogrebin).

⁷ Stroman wasn't the original director. She was the choreographer and took over after her husband Mike Ockrent's death.

It was no surprise then that when Brooks looked to adapt another of his successful films, *Young Frankenstein*, to the stage that he would want to work again with the artists that made *The Producers* such a success:

The musical relies on the same creative team that turned *The Producers* into a critical and box-office smashzilla in 2001.

The production team includes three Tony Award-winning designers of *The Producers*: three-time Tony Award-winning set designer Robin Wagner, five-time Tony Award-winning costume designer William Ivey Long and Tony Award-winning lighting designer Peter Kaczorowski. Hair and wig design is by *Producers* veteran Paul Huntley. Jonathan Deans is the sound designer. Two other *Producers* alumni complete the music department: Tony-award winning orchestrator Doug Besterman and musical director and vocal arranger Patrick S. Brady.

At the helm again are *Producers* alumni Tony-winning director-choreographer Stroman, Tony-winning co-librettists Brooks and Thomas Meehan, and music supervisor Glen Kelly, who made Brooks' songs for *The Producers* soar. (Jones, Playbill.com)

But whereas in the mounting of *The Producers*, the creative team had some fresh faces working in virgin territory, in the mounting of *Young Frankenstein* that same team was coming off of one of the biggest hits in a decade.

Prior to its opening, the hype and anticipation surrounding *Young Frankenstein* was fierce. But both the press and the public questioned whether the hit-making magic

captured by these theater makers on *The Producers* could be replicated. The New York Times' Charles Isherwood predicted that the show might get swallowed up by the large size theater that it was going into, and intimated that Brooks may have had dollar signs in his eyes knowing that *The Producers* could have filled a larger theater for most of its run:

Recently rumors have circulated that the next tenant at the Hilton may be "Young Frankenstein," Mel Brooks's eagerly anticipated follow-up to his smash hit "The Producers." This prospect should dismay anyone who harbors hopes that Mr. Brooks's adaptation of his spoof of horror pictures would be the equal of — or even superior to — his adorable musical about the machinations of a swindling producer. The level of mugging that would be required to put over a comedy in the cavernous Hilton, at 1,815 seats Broadway's second-largest theater, is terrifying to contemplate. If you've seen a show at the Hilton, you are probably aware of its drawbacks. It is about as intimate as a football stadium and as warmly inviting as a convention center. More to the point for the creators and backers of "Young Frankenstein," the history of the musicals that have played at this theater in its 10-year existence should give pause even to a producer confident of his show's superiority....

It is certainly possible that, as is, the Hilton will at last find a money-making, high-quality tenant in "Young Frankenstein." Most of the productions that have opened at the theater have been below-par musicals, after all. (I daresay "Hot Feet" would have trudged quickly into oblivion

even in the beloved Shubert Theater.) The Gershwin Theater, Broadway's biggest and even more charmless than the Hilton, has gone for long stretches without a successful tenant. But along came "Wicked," now making money hand over fist.

No doubt it is the potential for just that kind of coin-spinning that has enticed Mr. Brooks to consider putting his new baby into this big pram. Mindful that "The Producers" could have sold out its theater twice over during the early days of its run but lost altitude as the years went by, the thinking must be that to have more seats to sell when you're hot is the way to go. (Isherwood, NewYorkTimes.com)

Ultimately the show was met with tepid reviews from critics and did not perform financially, despite assurances from management even after announcing its closing date that it would pay back its investors in full. Theatrical pundits from the various rags decried that the hubris of the producing team, banking on the past success of *The Producers*, had much to do with its demise:

Of course every show has its faults, but "Young Frankenstein" committed a sin that many in the theater apparently found particularly hard to forgive: arrogance.

...his difficulties besetting "Young Frankenstein" began well before the recent market downturn. Mixed reviews, faulty marketing decisions and overheated expectations have hampered the show since its opening slightly more than a year ago and contributed to the troubles of the \$16-million-plus musical.

From the start Mel Brooks suffered from being, well, Mel Brooks. His previous show, “The Producers,” quickly crashed through box office and award records. There’s a story that after “Oklahoma!” opened, Oscar Hammerstein II asked a friend what he should do next, and the reply was “Shoot yourself.” Topping the top is always tough, but the creators of “Young Frankenstein” also seemed to suffer from excessive hubris. For starters, they passed over the St. James Theater, where “The Producers” had set up shop and had a spectacularly successful six-year run, for the Hilton Theater, the second-largest on Broadway with more than 1,800 seats. Then, even before the show opened, they set the cost of premium tickets to \$450. Paying \$375 could get a second-best orchestra seat while an already hefty \$120 put the buyer in the dress circle. “There’s no level of expectations we could set that this show couldn’t exceed,” Mr. [Robert F.X.] Sillerman [Brooks’ producing partner] said two months before the New York opening.”(Cohen, NewYorkTimes.com)

It’s clear that Sillerman, at the very least, believed that the public was going to bite twice because the same players were involved and it would be easy to write off *The Producers/Young Frankenstein* comparison as a case of hubristic Hollywood types, with the franchise mentality that is prevalent in Hollywood as being responsible for the hubris described by Cohen above, were it not for the fact that this kind of expectation has been repeated on other occasions in recent years to similar failure. *Catch Me If You Can* was

mounted in 2010 with a nearly identical creative team to 2002's mega-hit *Hairspray*. It opened to tepid reviews and closed at a complete loss.

As we have seen few directors of any sort are able to be called back to the original success that launched them into the "a-list." Frost again comments:

...I think more, when you talk about some of those so-called big name directors and you look at their track record, sometimes there just put on shows because they're big name directors and they're not the right director for the piece. Or you've got so much personality in the room you're never gonna get out of the weeds...

And I think it's really a mistake to hire somebody just because they're A-List. But I understand that there are certain investors and certain people who look at that and say well that person's not A-List. And then you have to have that conversation and go back and say well so and so wasn't a list, so and so wasn't a list. Most of those directors that make their debut on Broadway, many of them are coming as a unit...they've proven their success elsewhere, so they got great reviews out of town, they've proven that they work together as a team well. I think that's more important.

There's also a chance and a danger that the team could just be working on the show because it's a job, knowing that working on a Broadway musical will be financially remunerative, especially when a director or writer gets to the place that they are in

demand. They might be chosen because they are on the A-list, despite the fact that they may not be passionate about the project at all. Sue Frost again comments:

Producer-initiated projects, unless you're going to a team that already has the cogs in place, is just hard because potentially the only person that has a passion for it is the producer. And that's not fair to say about everything, but I think it's harder to put together a producer-driven project than a project that's had a little bit of its life to it.

It may be more difficult to get right, but as we have seen there are a number of successful Producer-driven projects that have become giant hits. The discerning producer putting together a team must be sure that the artists share the same ultimate vision for the project.

The added benefit of having a game creative team that is up for an extended development process is that the process gives the producer time to vet the creative team through that same process. Less experienced teams will grow through the development period and become more seasoned as the show approaches an impending Broadway run. According to Frost:

If you've made it that far then that's a team that's working together. If you haven't made it that far then people were falling by the wayside....If the team continues to strengthen then you're creating something together that can withstand the pressure of 15 million dollars and everybody and their brother looking for you to fail.

Again, it is ultimately up to the producer to discern whether or not the team is working well together. Beyond the initial choosing of the right director and writers for the project, the producer needs to discern whether the development process is proceeding successfully, either scuttling the project altogether when that process reaches a creative impasse (i.e., when the producer's vision no longer matches with that of the creative team) or replacing one or more members of the team.

In his memoir about the difficult development process of *Spider-Man: Turn Off the Dark*, *Song of Spider-Man*, bookwriter Glen Berger recounts a moment where the executives at Marvel Comics and Julie Taymor no longer saw eye-to-eye. According to Berger, Taymor's creative way into the piece way through a retelling of Ovid's myth of the spider-goddess Arachne, who would become a major character in the musical. (Berger 13). As the musical developed, a major difference of opinion arose between Marvel CEO Avi Arad and Julie Taymor surrounding the character. Arad wanted Arachne eliminated, and Taymor threatened to leave the project if they forced the change. (Berger 25). Even after Arad's departure, Marvel continued to push back against the Arachne character and subplot, sending notes after a 2007 workshop with the heading "Specific Reasons Why the Musical, if Unchanged, Will Adversely Affect Marvel's Brand," but nonetheless it remained. (Berger 79).

Eventually, after experiencing lengthy technical problems and an extended preview period, the show was reviewed by critics prior to an official opening. The version of the show centered on Arachne was panned. Taymor pushed back at the

producer's efforts to enforce major changes, resulting in her eventual removal from the project (Healy, [NewYorkTimes.com](#)).

One wonders what might have happened if someone on the producorial team recognized that moment as an indication that the director that had been chosen was not going to deliver the vision that the myriad of producers on the project had in mind. She was clear about the kind of show she was interested in mounting from the very start. If the desire was to have something less esoteric and more broad-based, it was clear she was not going to deliver on that. Whereas when she was selected as the Director of the *Lion King*, it was clearly due to her unique approach to storytelling and theatricality.

Because of its extensive other problems (technical, financial, negative press ahead of opening etc., lack of availability of composers Bono and the Edge (Berger 174-176)) *Spider Man: Turn Off the Dark* is perhaps not the best example of shows centered on A-List talent not working out the way the producers intended. However, consider instead *Houdini*, another high profile new original musical with declared Broadway aspirations that has received a lot of press coverage during its pre-production development.

In late 2010 it was announced that a musical based upon the life of illusionist Harry Houdini was being developed for Broadway with Hugh Jackman attached to star. The initial creative team was set with playwright and Oscar-winning screenwriter Aaron Sorkin and Danny Elfman, the celebrated film composer, with lyricist Glen Slater and *Hairspray*'s Jack O'Brien as director (Vozick-Levinson, [ew.com](#)). Two years later, Elfman was off the project and the producers attached *Wicked*'s Stephen Schwartz. (Healy, [artsbeat.nytimes.com](#)). Sorkin left the project in early 2013, to be replaced

thereafter by David Ives, followed by the departure of Schwartz in 2014 and Jackman in early 2015. (Healy,nytimes.com).

In his recent article on the musical's rocky development path, Patrick Healy of the New York Times lists scheduling conflicts as the primary reason for most of the departures listed above:

Asked if Mr. Jackman had underestimated the challenges of making a new musical — or if, in the end, the work wasn't good enough — Mr. [Scott] Sanders [, lead producer,] said by email:

'The process of creating a musical is akin to capturing lightning in a bottle. We were trying to do that, with some remarkable artists, and their schedules didn't sync up. We had to evaluate the situation and accept that our process would take longer than expected and sadly Hugh wasn't able to commit to the time.'

Soon after Mr. Jackman left, Mr. Schwartz met with the producers and said he no longer wanted to continue with the project, either. This pattern — artist after artist quitting when it suited them — underscored the downside of a producer-driven musical. But word of Mr. Schwartz's departure did not become public until October, when he told The Hartford Courant that he was done with "Houdini" but that "others may pursue it." The article irritated Mr. Sanders, for one, who called Mr. Schwartz to express his annoyance, contending that the takeaway from The Courant was that "Houdini" was dead. (Healy, NewYorkTimes.com)

Healy seems to echo Ms. Frost's comments about the dangers of producer-driven projects, but the real issue here does not lie in the fact that shows like *Houdini* and *Spider-Man* were ideas started in the mind of a producer, but in the approach the producers took to put the creative team together. It is important to look at the creative team as a collective, and examine what, if any, their previous relationship is to one another. Frost recommends that when putting a team together it may be helpful to go with artists that have some sort of pre-existing relationship.

I also want to say that when you put a director on and if you put a team together just because you've got a lot of big names if they don't have a history of working together I think that's a recipe for disaster too. Because they all come into it from a different place, they don't have a short hand, they don't. And I've kind of come to that conclusion over many, many years, where you're doing yourself a favor if there are relationships in place already. As long as they're manageable relationships. And they're willing to have you as a partner.

This kind of thinking has worked out for some producers when working with talent even of the caliber that the failed *Houdini* project had had.

Kinky Boots, based on the film of the same name, was conceived as a potential Broadway musical by producer Daryl Roth after she saw the film at the Sundance Film Festival in 2006. Roth brought on Hal Luftig as a producing partner and the two set about putting together the creative team, bringing aboard Jerry Mitchell to direct and Harvey Fierstein to write the book. What is interesting is Mitchell's comments about why they chose Harvey: "knew Harvey would be just right for the material and I trust him as a friend"(Raymond, Broadwaydirect.com). Shortly thereafter, recording artist and one time

Broadway performer Cyndi Lauper was brought on to write the score. Her connection was through Fierstein and she was brought aboard at Jerry Mitchell's suggestion, who knew she had an existing friendship with Fierstein:

Fierstein and Lauper were already friends. Mitchell had met Lauper when he'd choreographed a benefit for her ("I was worried," Lauper said, "I'm not Liza Minnelli" and he'd decided that since she was a "True Colors" outsider and a rebel herself, she'd be ideal to write songs about nonconformists and strugglers who share a love of shoes. Lauper, who did not want to do something that made her "feel like a hack" was down with that.

"I am Lola," she declared, naming the drag queen whose arrival and footwear needs save the shoe factory and will be played in this show by Billy Porter. Plus, Mitchell well knew, Lauper not only had years of experience crafting a danceable tune, but actually is far smarter than some people think (one "Kinky Boots" lyric, for the record, compares and contrasts the "strength of Sparta" with the "patience of Job"). And then there is the little matter of her selling more than 50 million albums and 20 million singles, making the 59-year-old one of the best-selling artists of all time."(Jones, Chicagotribune.com).

It's clear that the outsider in the situation, the part of the creative team new to the world of the Broadway musical, had at least some kind of a genuine artistic interest in the project.

Here you have three artists who are all accomplished in various fields, with many projects being juggled all at once, but because all the key players have a relationship to

one another, a loyalty, they make the project a priority. However, *Kinky Boots* was decidedly a Producer-driven project that arose from a producer-generated idea. The right artists were brought together for the right reasons and pre-existing personal relationships were leveraged. Though assembling a creative team with this sort of attitude does not guarantee success, it seems to allow for a much easier track in getting there. In this particular situation, the end result of the collaboration was a hugely successful Tony award-winning Broadway smash.

CONCLUSION

New Musicals on Broadway are a high risk-high reward proposition. In the 26 years from *Grand Hotel* to *Aladdin* there have only been 32 profitable new original musicals on Broadway. That's only slightly better than one per year. Since 2000 there have only been 21; since 2005, there have only been 14. The rate does not seem to be increasing as time progresses. Artists working in the medium, with few exceptions, have few opportunities of repeated commercial success with new musicals on Broadway, despite still being somewhat prolific. The fact is, however, that the practitioners that still do manage to have some repeat commercial success, creative producers, do not attain that repetition through utilization of the same creative teams, or teams that have commercial track records. They reach success through discerning who has the right aesthetic fit that aligns with their vision, and being involved in the development process to ensure the team is working well together and all are working toward the same goals.

When facing down these realities, only one conclusion can be drawn: a musical theater artist's track record of commercial success with new musicals on Broadway has nothing to do with, cannot, should not, and must not be utilized as a predictor of future commercial success, nor should it be a dominating factor in a producer's selection of that artist for a particular project.

The data covered in this paper illustrating successful artists working on new Broadway musicals show a wide background of previous experience amongst commercial successful artists. Producers must continue to look to this diverse background in assembling creative teams when mounting new Broadway musicals. They must

examine the whole of an artist's creative output across all related media and mediums, as well as their various works' critical and commercial responses. They must look at the relationships the various artists they are considering have with one another, and look for artists that share their passion for their idea in the mounting of a producer-driven musical.

All this must be weighed against the producer's own understanding of the needs of the project, his or her vision for its success, and how the artist's aesthetic as a whole fits into the picture of that vision's execution. Creative Producers must be present during the development process, evaluating both the work of the artists and the working relationship of the creative team as the project progresses forward. Everyone must speak from the same script.

There is no longer such a thing as a "Broadway" director, composer, lyricist, choreographer, or writer. We can say that, for directors in particular, the chance of getting a second or third hit is incredibly small. There are writers, directors, composers, lyricists and choreographers that understand how to apply their craft to works of musical theater, who are capable of creating musical theater on a large scale and who are the right choices for a particular project for which the venue of choice happens to be a Broadway theater.

Yes, Broadway has a specific audience, and it has specific challenges that come with it, both logistically on the production side and artistically on the creative side. However, a visionary artist with no exposure to those specific challenges can be bolstered by experienced producers, or with artistic collaborators that have that experience. Lack of Broadway musical "experience" should not be an immediate disqualifier. If enterprising producers had heeded that rule, *The Producers*, *The Lion King*, *Avenue Q*, *Wicked*, and the rest of the hits from 1989-2014 would never have been hits.

It is time this myth of needing a “top” writer or director is put to rest. Broadway musicals need great artists, regardless of their previous commercial successes or failures. When faced with the choice of an A-list artist who happens to be the name on everyone’s lips versus an up-and-comer or outsider with the right vision, chemistry with the rest of the team and passion for the project, the up-and-comer or outsider is the clear choice.

**APPENDIX A: LIST OF PROLIFIC ARTISTS WORKING ON NEW ORIGINAL
BROADWAY MUSICALS 1989-2014.**

Most Prolific Broadway Directors of New Original Broadway Musicals

1989-2014

(From the Opening of *Grand Hotel* through the Opening of *Aladdin*, directors with three or more new musicals)

Financial success listed in **bold**

◆- Indicates an additional financial success with a new musical without an original score

* indicates the second outing being with a different producer than their debut in the medium.

♠-indicates production was produced at or by a not for profit theatre.

OF NOTE: every director except for Des McAnuff and Bartlett Sher who began directing new musicals after *Grand Hotel* has worked with a new set of producers on their second outing with a new original musical.

Also of note: Casey Nicholaw currently has a perfect track record commercially.

To present a complete picture of the Director's track record with new original musicals, original musicals produced by not profit theaters are also included in this list.

THREE FINANCIAL SUCCESSES

Casey Nicholaw:

The Drowsy Chaperone (2006)

The Book of Mormon (2011)

Aladdin (2014)

TWO FINANCIAL SUCCESSES

Michael Greif:

Rent (1996) - success

Never Gonna Dance (2003)*

Grey Gardens (2006)
Next to Normal (2009) - success
If/Then (2014)

Jack O'Brien:

The Full Monty (2000)
Hairspray (2002) - success*
Dirty Rotten Scoundrels (2005)
How the Grinch Stole Christmas (2006)
A Catered Affair (2007)
Catch Me If You Can (2011)

James Lapine:

Falsettos (1992)
Passion (1994)*
25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee (2005) – success

Des McAnuff♦:

The Who's Tommy (1993) - success
Dracula (2004)
Jersey Boys (non-original score)

ONE FINANCIAL SUCCESS

Michael Mayer:

Triumph of Love (1997)
Thoroughly Modern Millie (2002)*
Spring Awakening (2006) - success
American Idiot (2010)

Susan Stroman:

The Producers (2001) - success
Thou Shalt Not (2001)*♠
The Frogs (2004)♠
Young Frankenstein (2007)
The Scottsboro Boys (2010)
Big Fish (2013)
Bullets Over Broadway (2014) (non-original score)

Christopher Ashley:

All Shook Up (2005)
Xanadu (2007)*
Memphis (2009) - success
Leap of Faith (2012)

John Rando:

Urinetown (2001)
Dance of the Vampires (2002)*
The Wedding Singer (2006)
A Christmas Story (2012)

Jeff Calhoun:

Brooklyn (2004)
Bonnie and Clyde (2011)*
Newsies (2012) - success

NO FINANCIAL SUCCESSES

Hal Prince:

Kiss of the Spider Woman (1993)
Parade (1998)
LoveMusik (2007)

Bartlett Sher:

The Light in the Piazza (2005) ♠
Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown (2012) ♠
The Bridges of Madison County (2014)

Trevor Nunn:

Aspects of Love (1990)
Sunset Boulevard (1994)
The Woman in White (2005)

Scott Ellis:

Steel Pier (1997)
The Adventures of Tom Sawyer (2001)*
Curtains (2007)

Walter Bobbie:

Footloose (1998)
High Fidelity (2006)*
White Christmas (2008)

George C Wolfe:

Jelly's Last Jam (1992)
The Wild Party (2000)*
Caroline, Or Change (2004)

Most Prolific Broadway Writers of Original Musicals

(three or more shows from 1989-2014, from the opening of *Grand Hotel* through the opening of *Aladdin*)

Financial Success listed in bold

* = second outing being with a different producer than their debut

FOUR FINANCIAL SUCCESSES

Tim Rice (lyricist):

Beauty and the Beast (1994)

The Lion King (1997)

Aida (2000)

Aladdin (2014)

THREE FINANCIAL SUCCESSES:

Alan Menken (composer):

Beauty and the Beast (1994)

The Little Mermaid (2008)

Sister Act (2011)

Newsies (2012)

Leap of Faith (2012)

Aladdin (2014)

Elton John (composer):

The Lion King (1997)

Aida (2000)

Lestat (2006)

Billy Elliot (2008)

TWO FINANCIAL SUCCESSES:

Howard Ashman (lyricist):⁸

Beauty and the Beast (1994)

The Little Mermaid (2008)

Aladdin (2014)

Thomas Meehan (book writer):

Ain't Broadway Grand (1993)

The Producers (2001)*

Hairspray (2002)

Bombay Dreams (2004)

Young Frankenstein (2007)

Cry-Baby (2008)

⁸ All of Ashman's Broadway shows were produced posthumously.

Elf (2010)
Chaplin (2012)

Harvey Fierstein (book writer):
A Catered Affair (2008)
Newsies (2012)*
Kinky Boots (2013)

ONE FINANCIAL SUCCESS:

Chad Beguelin (book writer):
The Wedding Singer (2006)
Elf (2010)
Aladdin (2014)

Tom Kitt (composer):
High Fidelity (2006)
Next to Normal (2009)*
Bring It On (2012)
If/Then (2014)

David Yazbek (composer/lyricist):
The Full Monty (2000)
Dirty Rotten Scoundrels (2005)*
Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown (2010)

NO FINANCIAL SUCCESS:

Jeanine Tesori (composer):
Thoroughly Modern Millie (2002)
Caroline, Or Change (2004)*
Shrek (2008)
Fun Home (2015)

Frank Wildhorn (composer):
Jekyll and Hyde (1997)
The Scarlet Pimpernel (1997)*
The Civil War (1999)
Dracula (2004)
Wonderland (2011)
Bonnie and Clyde (2011)

Jason Robert Brown (composer/lyricist):
Parade (1998)
13 (2008)*

The Bridges of Madison County (2014)
Honeymoon in Vegas (2015)

Amanda Green (composer/lyricist):
High Fidelity (2006)
Bring It On (2012)*
Hands on a Hardbody (2013)

John Kander (composer/lyricist):
Kiss of the Spider Woman (1993)
Steel Pier (1997)*
Curtains (2007)
The Scottsboro Boys (2010)

Fred Ebb: (composer/lyricist):
Kiss of the Spider Woman (1993)
Steel Pier (1997)*
Curtains (2007)
The Scottsboro Boys (2010)

Terrence McNally (book writer):
Kiss of the Spider Woman (1993)
Ragtime (1998)
The Full Monty (2000)
Catch Me If You Can (2011)

Lynn Ahrens (lyricist):
Once on This Island (1990)
My Favorite Year (1992)
Ragtime (1998)
Seussical (2000)
Rocky (2014)

Stephen Flaherty (composer/book writer):
Once on This Island (1990)
My Favorite Year (1992)
Ragtime (1998)
Seussical (2000)
Rocky (2014)

Most Prolific Broadway Choreographers of Original Musicals

(three or more shows from 1989-2014, from the opening of *Grand Hotel* through the opening of *Aladdin*)

Success listed in **bold**

* = second outing being with a different producer than their debut

⊕ Indicates Choreographer was also the Director of the musical.

THREE FINANCIAL SUCCESSES

Casey Nicholaw:

- Spamalot (2005) - success**
- The Drowsy Chaperone (2006) - success*⊕**
- Elf (2010)⊕
- The Book of Mormon (2011) – success ⊕**
- Aladdin (2014) – success ⊕**

Wayne Cilento:

- The Who's Tommy (1993) - success**
- Aida (2000) - success***
- Wicked (2003) - success**

Sergio Trujillo:

- Jersey Boys (2005) - success**
- Next to Normal (2009) - success***
- Memphis (2009) - success**
- The Addams Family (2010)
- Leap of Faith (2012)
- Hands on a Hardbody (2013)

Jerry Mitchell:

- The Full Monty (2000) - success**
- Hairspray (2002) - success***
- Never Gonna Dance (2003)
- Legally Blonde (2007)⊕
- Priscilla Queen of the Desert (2011)
- Catch Me If You Can (2011)
- Kinky Boots (2013) - success⊕**

ONE FINANCIAL SUCCESS

Susan Stroman:

Crazy for You (1992) (not an original score)

Big (1996)

Steel Pier (1997)

The Producers (2001) ⊕

Thou Shalt Not (2001)*⊕

The Frogs (2004)⊕

Young Frankenstein (2007)⊕

The Scottsboro Boys (2010)⊕

Big Fish (2013)⊕

Bullets Over Broadway (2014)⊕

Christopher Gattelli:

High Fidelity (2006)

13 (2009)*

Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown (2010)

Newsies (2012)

Andy Blankenbuehler:

In the Heights (2008)

9 to 5 (2009)*

The People in the Picture (2011)

Bring It On (2012)

Steven Hoggett:

American Idiot (2010)

Once (2012)*

Rocky (2014)

John Carrafa:

Urinetown (2001)

Dance of the Vampires (2002)*

Good Vibrations (2005)⊕

Dan Knechtges:

The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee (2005)

Xanadu (2007)*

Lysistrata Jones (2011)⊕

NO FINANCIAL SUCCESSES

Rob Ashford:

Thoroughly Modern Millie (2002)
The Wedding Singer (2006)*
Curtains (2007)
Cry-Baby (2008)

Warren Carlyle:

A Tale of Two Cities (2008)
Chaplin (2012)*⊕
A Christmas Story (2012)

Patricia Birch:

Anna Karenina (1992)
Parade (1998)*
LoveMusik (2007)

Graciela Daniele:

Dangerous Games (1989)
Once on This Island (1990)*⊕
The Goodbye Girl (1993)
Ragtime (1998)
Marie Christine (1999)
The Pirate Queen (2007)

Joey McKneely:

The Life (1997)
The Wild Party (2000)*
The Boy from Oz (2003)

Anthony Van Laast:

Mamma Mia! (2001) – Success, not original score.
Bombay Dreams (2004)*
Sister Act (2011)

Appendix B, the shows of Disney Theatrical under Thomas Schumacher

(and the artists attached, and if the Producer had worked with the artist on a show before, and if the show made a profit on Broadway)

SHOW	NEW ARTIST	REPEAT ARTIST	ROLE	\$ = PROFIT
The Lion King	Elton John		Music	\$
The Lion King		Tim Rice	Lyrics	\$
The Lion King	Roger Allers and Irene Mecchi		Book	\$
The Lion King	Julie Taymor		Director	\$
The Lion King	Garth Fagan		Choreographer	\$
Aida		Elton John	Music	\$
Aida		Tim Rice	Lyrics	\$
Aida		Linda Woolverton	Book	\$
Aida	Robert Falls		Book	\$
Aida	David Henry Hwang		Book	\$
Aida	Robert Falls		Director	\$
Aida		Wayne Cilento	Choreographer	\$
Tarzan	Phil Collins		Music	x
Tarzan	Phil Collins		Lyrics	x
Tarzan		David Henry Hwang	Book	x
Tarzan	Bob Crowley		Director	x
Tarzan	Meryl Tankard		Choreographer	x
Mary Poppins	George Stiles and Anthony Drewe		Music	\$
Mary Poppins	George Stiles and Anthony Drewe		Lyrics	\$
Mary Poppins	Julian Fellowes		Book	\$
Mary Poppins	Richard Eyre		Director	\$
Mary Poppins	Matthew Bourne		Choreographer/Co-Director	\$
Mary Poppins	Stephen Mear		Co-Choreographer	\$

The Little Mermaid		Alan Menken	Music	x
The Little Mermaid		Howard Ashman	Lyrics	x
The Little Mermaid		Glen Slater	Lyrics	x
The Little Mermaid		Doug Wright	Book	x
The Little Mermaid	Francesca Zambello		Director	x
The Little Mermaid		Stephen Mear	Choreographer	x
Newsies the musical		Alan Menken	Music	\$
Newsies the musical	Jack Feldman		Lyrics	\$
Newsies the musical		Harvey Fierstein	Book	\$
Newsies the musical		Jeff Calhoun	Director	\$
Newsies the musical		Christopher Gattelli	Choreographer	\$
Aladdin		Alan Menken	Music	\$
Aladdin		Howard Ashman	Lyrics	\$
Aladdin		Tim Rice	Lyrics	\$
Aladdin		Chad Beguelin	Book	\$
Aladdin		Casey Nicholaw	Director	\$
Aladdin		Casey Nicholaw	Choreographer	\$

Appendix C, the shows of Kevin McCollum and the Producing Office

(and the artists attached, and if those artists were someone the producer had worked with before, if the show made a profit on Broadway)

SHOW	NEW ARTIST	REPEAT ARTIST	ROLE	\$ = PROFIT	w/ Jeffrey Seller	w/ Robyn Goodman
RENT	Jonathan Larson		Music	\$	Jeffrey Seller	
RENT	Jonathan Larson		Lyrics	\$	Jeffrey Seller	
RENT	Jonathan Larson		Book	\$	Jeffrey Seller	
RENT	Michael Greif		Director	\$	Jeffrey Seller	
RENT	Marlies Yearby		Choreographer	\$	Jeffrey Seller	
AVENUE Q	Robert Lopez and Jeff Marx		Music	\$	Jeffrey Seller	Robyn Goodman
AVENUE Q	Robert Lopez and Jeff Marx		Lyrics	\$	Jeffrey Seller	Robyn Goodman
AVENUE Q	Jeff Whitty		Book	\$	Jeffrey Seller	Robyn Goodman
AVENUE Q	Jason Moore		Director	\$	Jeffrey Seller	Robyn Goodman
AVENUE Q	Ken Roberson		Choreographer	\$	Jeffrey Seller	Robyn Goodman
THE DROWSEY CHAPERONE	Lisa Lambert and Greg Morrison		Music	\$		
THE DROWSEY CHAPERONE	Lisa Lambert and Greg Morrison		Lyrics	\$		
THE DROWSEY CHAPERONE	Bob Martin and Don McKellar		Book	\$		
THE DROWSEY CHAPERONE	Casey Nicholaw		Director	\$		

THE DROWSEY CHAPERONE		Casey Nicholaw	Choreographer	\$		
HIGH FIDELITY	Tom Kitt		Music	x	Jeffrey Seller	Robyn Goodman
HIGH FIDELITY	Amanda Green		Lyrics	x	Jeffrey Seller	Robyn Goodman
HIGH FIDELITY	David Lindsay-Abaire		Book	x	Jeffrey Seller	Robyn Goodman
HIGH FIDELITY		Walter Bobbie	Director	x	Jeffrey Seller	Robyn Goodman
HIGH FIDELITY	Christopher Gattelli		Choreographer	x	Jeffrey Seller	Robyn Goodman
IN THE HEIGHTS	Lin-Manuel Miranda		Music	\$	Jeffrey Seller	Robyn Goodman
IN THE HEIGHTS	Lin-Manuel Miranda		Lyrics	\$	Jeffrey Seller	Robyn Goodman
IN THE HEIGHTS	Quiara Alegria Hudes		Book	\$	Jeffrey Seller	Robyn Goodman
IN THE HEIGHTS	Thomas Kail		Director	\$	Jeffrey Seller	Robyn Goodman
IN THE HEIGHTS	Andy Blankenbuehler		Choreographer	\$	Jeffrey Seller	Robyn Goodman
[title of show]	Jeff Bowen		Music	x	Jeffrey Seller	
[title of show]	Jeff Bowen		Lyrics	x	Jeffrey Seller	
[title of show]	Hunter Bell		Book	x	Jeffrey Seller	
[title of show]	Michael Berresse		Director	x	Jeffrey Seller	
[title of show]	Michael Berresse		Choreographer	x	Jeffrey Seller	

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