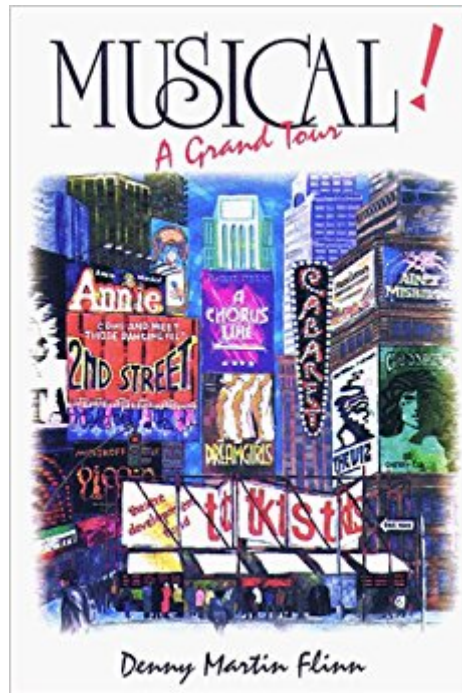




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Musical!: A Grand Tour



Synopsis

MUSICAL! is a complete narrative history of the musical theater in the United States from the 19th century to the present day. Engaging, witty, and opinionated, this is a history that successfully navigates the course between academic lecture and entertaining survey.

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Customer Reviews

Many histories of Broadway musicals are on the shelves, most of them taking the predictable path of chronological order, or by composer. Denny Martin Flynn's history follows a rough chronology, but instead examines the development of musicals in chapters divided by dominant personality ("Jerome Robbins and Oklahoma!"), by discipline ("Lyrics," "Bookwriters"), or by genre ("Revues," "The Rock Musical"). Though oddly apocalyptic toward the end, given the recent vitality of musicals, the book offers a useful, fresh perspective on the 20th-century history of a magical art form.

In the world of musical theater, everyone has an opinion, although few have expressed theirs as cogently and sharply as Flinn, author of the excellent *What They Did for Love* (LJ 6/15/89). The 26 chapters he presents here cover all aspects of the genre, from classical Greek performances to the present, without spending too much time on any one period. Students will find the general overviews useful, but the real audience for this marvelous book is the musical fan, who will adore Flinn's wealth of solid examples, particularly in the chapters on music and lyrics. How could one not like a book that unequivocally states that Lloyd Webber "has created scarce melodies for abysmal

librettos and expensive, dismally choreographed extravaganzas"? Ganzl continues to churn out genre histories (Ganzl's Book of the Musical Theater, LJ 4/15/88; Ganzl's Book of the Broadway Musical, LJ 9/1/95), but there is still much to recommend this latest translation. Although he lacks Flinn's bite, Ganzl succinctly covers the same period in greater detail, with cast listings, plot summaries, and song information for select representative works throughout the years. The first third of this work, covering the premodern era, will be especially useful for theater students, but it is the latter sections that offer numerous surprises. How many serious theater works include data on *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*? Thanks to its wealth of trivia and sharp perspective, Flinn's is the superior work and is highly recommended for all theater collections; large subject collections will also want to add Ganzl's latest. Anthony J. Adam, Prairie View A&M Univ. Lib., Tex. Copyright 1997 Reed Business Information, Inc.

... it does contain some interesting material in amongst the dross; the problem is finding that needle in the strewn hay. Clearly Flinn loves the theater and obviously has done a lot of reading about the subject. Unfortunately, he included just about everything he had read about musicals in such helter-skelter fashion that I found myself wanting to take out a blue pencil to tighten his prose and impose some organization on his material. There are factual errors, contradictions among his own opinions and plain illiteracies (e.g., 'wile away their time', 'both as dancer, choreographer and writer'). He goes on and on about the brilliance of Michael Bennett and how 'Chorus Line' pretty much is the end of the Broadway era, and then we note that he was a dancer in a Las Vegas company of 'Chorus Line.' He damns Sondheim with faint praise. He does lambaste the dumbed-down musicals of Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice, which I applaud heartily. There were some pictures of original casts and productions but often we were led to believe a picture is of the original production when it is obvious that it is of a revival. I could not recommend this book as a basic text about popular musical theater. Scott Morrison

Denny Martin Flinn obviously has a great interest and love of musicals. I applaud this facet of his personality. Unfortunately my minor contribution to the genre has aroused nothing but his ire. Should I defend myself? Would it not be better to pretend I never saw his work? Well, as he has based his attack on little more than 2 songs from one of my more successful efforts, a show about an Argentine lady called *Evita*, I feel I can speak out, albeit modestly. I shall refrain from using words he used about me like "drivel" and "illiterate" that clouded Denny's perspective. After all, he may hit it big one day (his writing shows great promise) and I would then be sorry I had offended

him. "Buenos Aires", the song that particularly upset him, is sung in the show by a fairly uneducated working-class lass of 16. I therefore felt that too sophisticated a lyric would not match her strident and unsubtle views of life. Eva Peron singing "You're The Top" would not be appropriate. DMF asserts (quite rightly) that someone using the word "coming" in a lyric should be aware of its other meaning - I agree, but in "Buenos Aires" the sexual interpretation of that word was the principal interpretation and the key to the song. DMF spotted this but thought I hadn't! Also I am misquoted: it's "shoot" not "shout me up with your blood..." To be accused of not advancing the plot with my lyrics is a little unfair as there is no book in any of my shows. Therefore the lyrics are the book, and the plot. In fact I even won a Tony for the book of *Evita*! I said when I accepted the award that it was a bit ridiculous for me to win as there was no book as such, but reflected afterwards that the plot, told entirely thru sung words, must have qualified me. *Evita* may be dire in DMF's opinion, but the terrible songs certainly advance the plot. He also has a go about Christian Dior and Lauren Bacall references in "Rainbow High" having nothing to do with Argentina "just after World War II". Well, yes and no. Both Dior's New Look and the height of Bacall's fame ("The Big Sleep") took place in 1947, when Eva was desperate to make her mark on the world stage. Reference to two world-wide popular icons would have been quite natural to a wildly ambitious woman in the presence of her private dressers and promoters. Anyway, I am suitably chastised as a "hackmeister" and shall avoid DMF at parties. Those who don't hate everything I've done might like to check out the following five attempts at a good lyric which I feel fairly happy with: *I Don't Know How To Love Him*, *One Night In Bangkok*, *Pity The Child*, *High Flying Adored*, *Circle Of Life*. There are a few others knocking around and a few singers from Elvis to Elton to Barbra to Elaine have had a go so they're not too hard to find. I warmly recommend this book to all but Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber fans. Tim Rice Aug 2 1998

Mr. Flynn's idea of tracing the musical back to ancient Greece has merit, and in the hands of a better writer might have worked. Sadly, Mr. Flynn's historical accuracy is suspect at best-- "Except for Spain's Lope de Vega, no significant dramatic literature arose out of the Renaissance . . ." is a prime example of his errors. Mr. Flynn is also a graceless writer (who apparently had no editor) which results in sentences like the following: "Early script drafts indicate that Hammerstein suffered too much respect for Ferber's novel and too little experience of his own." He frequently forces irrelevant but interesting tidbits of information into his narrative when the reader would be better served by an asterisk and a footnote. He also confuses his personal likes and dislikes (see entries on Joan Diener and Onna White) with serious critical commentary. The results sound bitchy and

undermine his credibility. This book has good information in it, and if used in tandem with a more accurate history of musicals, it could be useful. I would not recommend this book to anyone as a stand-alone text. Sadly, the people who will pick up on the errors are the ones who don't need the book as a reference. If you must read it, check it out of the library--don't waste your money.

The introductory chapter on the history of musical theatre from ancient Greece to the 20th century is outstanding. I've never read any account that was better or more thorough. Unfortunately, that's the only strong part of the book. The rest of it is dull to read and contains many factual errors. Still, I'd recommend borrowing it from the library just to read the intro.

I found this book to be much more interesting than other histories out there on Musical Theatre. There are some errors, and I disagree with the idea that the American Musical ended with Chorus Line, but all in all I found the book to be very entertaining.

This book feels more like a collection of unrelated magazine articles than a book. A lot of the information is repeated (Funny Girl & Gypsy had the best overtures, pit bands are good, etc) and especially towards the end, the author goes from historian to strident critic.

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