

PlayNotes

SEASON: 45 ISSUE: 07

The Last Five Years by Jason Robert Brown



PORTLANDSTAGE
The Theater of Maine

BACKGROUND INFORMATION
INTERVIEWS & COMMENTARY

Discussion Series

Page to Stage discussions are presented in partnership with the Portland Public Library. These discussions, led by Portland Stage artistic staff, actors, directors, and designers answer questions, share stories and explore the challenges of bringing a particular play to the stage. Page to Stage occurs at noon on the Tuesday two weeks before a show opens at the Portland Public Library's Main Branch.

The Artistic Perspective, hosted by Artistic Director Anita Stewart, is an opportunity for audience members to delve deeper into the themes of the show through conversation with special guests. A different scholar, visiting artist, playwright, or other expert will join the discussion each time. The Artistic Perspective discussions are held after the first Sunday matinee performance.

Curtain Call discussions offer a rare opportunity for audience members to talk about the production with the performers. Through this forum, the audience and cast explore topics that range from the process of rehearsing and producing the text to character development to issues raised by the work. Curtain Call discussions are held after the second Sunday matinee performance.

All discussions are free and open to the public. Show attendance is not required. To subscribe to a discussion series performance, please call the Box Office at 207.774.0465.



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The Last Five Years by Jason Robert Brown

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Thoughts from the Editors: What's your Favorite Musical and Why?



While not considered a traditional musical, my favorite story with music is *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*. Amongst the chaos of war, gender politics, poverty, and so much more, this grunge-punk musical exposes something much more vulnerable. For Hedwig Robinson, a frontwoman in a fictitious band, the lifelong process of finding her own strength, in the face of incredible odds, erases the facades of character and confidence, exposing a fragility we all have. Who are you? What are you doing here? How do you love yourself? Staged more akin to a rock concert than a traditional play, this musical strikes a nostalgic tone and reminds me of all the years I spent hanging in rock halls, crowd surfing with people like Alexis Krauss from Sleigh Bells or just being in a sea of people. Hedwig Robinson reminds me that all of us misfits, losers, and strange rock-and-rollers can find out that we are whole.

- Dylan Gurrera, *Directing & Dramaturgy Intern*



I think *Sweeney Todd* is a near-perfect piece of storytelling. I'm a big Stephen Sondheim fan in general because I tend to gravitate towards plot-driven ensemble pieces. I also love musicals that tap into my nerdy folklore and mythology obsessions. I'm pretty excited to see *Hadestown* because it checks all those boxes and more. I love the way the director, Rachel Chavkin, uses the ensemble's movement to create a poetic illustration of the music and narrative. *Hadestown* takes on a myth about someone so moved by love and grief that they want to change space and time to get their lover back. However, the show is about more than just reuniting with lost love: it's about challenging a potentially unjust society. It tackles oppression, resistance, and community while keeping love at its core. It's also the only musical directed by a woman on Broadway this season, so that's pretty important to me, too.

- Rebecca Rovezzi, *Directing & Dramaturgy Intern*



Honestly, when I am looking for music to listen to, musicals are not my first choice. As someone who likes indie, folk, and pop music, I have mostly been drawn to musicals such as *Once*, *Spring Awakening*, and *The Last Five Years*. Musical like these fit with my taste in music and I can enjoy them. I'm often drawn to modern musicals because I can connect to them on an emotional level. I connect to *The Last Five Years* because I empathize with Cathy and am in love with her songs. I love how her songs are honest and make vulnerable not only the character, but also the audience. I'm very excited that Portland Stage is bringing *The Last Five Years* and its heart-wrenching songs to the stage.

- Paige Farley, *Education Intern*



To preface my answer, I'd first like to say how I don't like a lot of musicals. I'm not a fan of the typical Broadway show, with its huge proscenium-style performance and spectacular nature, nor the racism and sexism that often abound both in the script and the production of many musicals (which are still immensely popular—look at the whitewashed revival of *Miss Saigon*). Yet, paradoxically, some of my very favorite theater productions are musicals. Music strikes a vein in so many people, including myself, that makes the material more accessible, touching, and even cathartic. I deeply appreciate the potential power of musicals; music and theater can be a magical combination—as it is in one of my favorite shows, *Fun Home*, by Lisa Kron and Jeanine Tesori. I love this musical for a multiplicity of reasons. Not only is it the first Broadway show to feature a lesbian protagonist, is one of the few by a female writer and composer, and has a simply gorgeous score—but it is also a nuanced look into complicated family dynamics and non-linear storytelling. Alison Bechdel, the original author of the graphic novel *Fun Home*, wrote, “[The musical] seemed to get to the emotional heart of things more directly than my book had.” I think there's a subtlety, intimacy, and depth to *Fun Home* that is made all the more powerful through music.

- Jae-Yeon Yoo, *Directing & Dramaturgy Intern*



I have always been a huge fan of musicals—I love the way the music can elevate the story and engage audience members who would otherwise not enjoy seeing a theatrical production. I particularly love musicals with small casts and modern music, and I love musicals that explore sad topics through humor and through song. For example, I love the way *Come From Away* suddenly shifts from lighthearted jokes and fun, bouncy songs to somber realizations of the situation that the characters are in. Similarly, I love *Heathers* and *Waitress* because they both explore very heavy topics in ways that only musicals could do—the right blend of music, humor, and seriousness through song, which leads the audience to feel a complex collection of emotions.

While I enjoy watching and being involved with plays as well, I think there is just something so magical about a story that can only be achieved through the expert balance of music and spoken word.

- Emily Lawrence, *Education Intern*

Focus Questions

BY PAIGE FARLEY & EMILY LAWRENCE

1. What is a nonlinear plot structure? How does it impact/enhance storytelling? What are some examples of books, movies, plays, and shows that employ it?
2. How do you think time can change our perception of a relationship?
3. What societal pressures convince people to stay in relationships even when they know the relationship is over?
4. What does it mean to “have it all?” How would you define having “made it” in the world?
5. What are some of the societal expectations women face when they are in a relationship? What are some of the societal expectations men face in a relationship?

Pre-Show Activities

BY PAIGE FARLEY & EMILY LAWRENCE

1. The music in *The Last Five Years* is more contemporary-sounding than many earlier musicals, but it’s certainly not the only modern musical to adopt contemporary sounds. Many musicals today incorporate modern music styles, which is a shift from earlier musicals. Find a song from a musical from the Golden Age of Musicals and compare it to a song from *The Last Five Years*. What are some things these songs have in common, and what are some differences between them? How do we incorporate modern music styles into musicals today?
2. *The Last Five Years* is told almost exclusively through song. Look up the soundtrack for the show on YouTube. Pick a song from the show and analyze it. What part of the play is this song happening in? What part of the character’s life are we seeing during this song? What emotions are they feeling? Who are they speaking to? Present your analysis to the class. Each group should pick a different song, so that ultimately every song is analyzed.
3. *The Last Five Years* is a nonlinear musical. Research what makes a piece of work nonlinear. Then create a short story about your day yesterday, utilizing one of the elements of a nonlinear story. You can use flashbacks, parallel narratives, time shifts, or any of the other elements that make a story nonlinear. What is the effect of writing about your day in a nonlinear fashion?



"THE NEXT TEN MINUTES" IN THE 2013 OFF-BROADWAY REVIVAL AND THE ORIGINAL OFF-BROADWAY PRODUCTION.

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About the Play

BY JAE-YEON YOO

*“There is an inherent intimacy [to *The Last Five Years*]. Not a theatrical intimacy but an emotional intimacy that is very rare in musicals, or even in plays. It’s a piece that gets very close to the audience.”*

– Jason Robert Brown

A contemporary classic by Tony Award-winning lyricist and composer Jason Robert Brown, this hit musical is told almost entirely through song. *The Last Five Years* is your typical love/loss story in many ways—but with a time-bending twist: it simultaneously moves backward and forward through time. It deconstructs a love affair and marriage over the course of five years. Jamie, an ambitious, up-and-coming novelist, travels forward in time—beginning from when he first meets Cathy and ending with the disintegration of their marriage. Meanwhile, Cathy, an aspiring actress, starts from the end; as the show progresses, she travels backwards in time to her first date with Jamie. The different timelines converge only once in the show: at their wedding, which is in the middle of both narratives.

Brown, who started out wanting “to tell a simple story about a relationship falling apart [without] lots of artificially imposed ‘surprises,’” stumbled upon this unique chronological structure because he “was immediately aware that there was a danger in that the audience would get ahead of the characters” with this kind of storyline. He says in an interview, “Once I hit on the idea of the alternating chronologies, it seemed like the perfect way to tell the story, both because it solved the problem of the audience getting ahead, and because on a metaphorical level, it said exactly what I wanted the show to say: these are two people who were never really in the same place at the same time.” The piece dissects what it means to love and be loved by another human being, but it also is a careful examination of ambition, illusions, communication, and the definition of partnership.

It is often suggested that *The Last Five Years* originated from Brown’s personal experiences, especially concerning his relationship with his former wife, Theresa O’Neill. O’Neill—who was then a struggling, non-Jewish actress, much like Cathy—protested Brown’s depiction of their marriage. She threatened to file a lawsuit against

Brown and the musical, citing that it violated their divorce agreements. Brown revised the musical due to this lawsuit, including changing a song called “I Could Be in Love with Someone Like You” to “Shiksa Goddess,” in order to more clearly differentiate the character of Cathy from O’Neill. However, he also stated, “Everything I write comes from my life, but I’m not narcissistic or sadistic enough to make the contents of my marriage a matter of public record, you know what I mean? That wasn’t the aim of the piece. I think in writing a show about a couple that fall[s] apart, I was hoping that I’d maybe be able to come to terms with that in my own life. But I wasn’t going to come to terms with it by writing something *about* me.”

Ultimately, Brown has created characters here that have distinct lives and personalities of their own—Jamie and Cathy remain relatable, flawed human beings that audiences continue to empathize with. Brown says, “I felt very sure, and still do, that there are no victims and no bad guys. Both of these people are equally responsible for the good things and the bad things in their relationship. It is of course my hope that the audience perceives it that way as well. I really just wanted to be honest about who these people were and how they acted.”

This musical has been lauded for its complex characters and beautiful score. It first premiered in 2001, at Northlight Theatre (Skokie, IL). Since then, it has had multiple revivals off Broadway, has been translated into over five different languages and performed overseas, and remains a popular production on college campuses and at regional theaters throughout the US. A film version was released in 2015, starring Anna Kendrick and Jeremy Jordan.

About the Playwright: Jason Robert Brown

BY JAE-YEON YOO



JASON ROBERT BROWN,
PHOTO BY MATTHEW MURPHY.

Jason Robert Brown was born in the suburbs of New York City in 1970. He was raised Jewish and attended Eastman School of Music for two years, but moved to New York City to pursue a career in theater before finishing his degree. In New York, he played piano in nightclubs and cabarets. His first show was *Songs for a New World* in 1996, a song cycle that 25-year-old Brown composed and Daisy Prince (daughter of the famed theater producer/director, Hal Prince) directed. From then on, Brown has found major commercial and critical success.

Brown wrote the music and lyrics for *The Last Five Years*, *Parade* (book by Alfred Uhry), *13* (book by Dan Elish and Robert Horn), *The Bridges of Madison County* (book by Masha Norman), *Honeymoon in Vegas* (book by Andrew Bergman), and he contributed songs to *Urban Cowboy*. He has won multiple awards, such as the Tony Award for Best Score, three Drama Desk Awards, the Kleban Award, and the Gilman & Gonzalez-Falla Foundation Award. As a conductor and arranger, Brown's credits include *Dina Was*, *A New Brain*, *John and Jen*, and Yoko Ono's *New York Rock*. He has also released two solo music albums of his own, *Wearing Someone Else's Clothes* and *How We React and How We Recover*.

Brown lives with his wife, composer Georgia Stitt, and daughters in NYC. He is a proud member of the Dramatists Guild and the American Federation of Musicians Local 802 and 47.

Excerpts from a 2013 Playbill interview, when Brown himself directed an off-Broadway revival of *The Last Five Years*:

What is it about the show that's resonated with so many people?

Jason Robert Brown (JRB): I love that these characters have very full, honest emotional lives. A lot of musical theater has to stint on those things, but I didn't write this for anybody but me. I had something I needed to say, which gave me freedom to write these characters as deeply as I could, so they're flawed but very recognizable. People see themselves very much in these characters.

Is it accurate to describe the show as autobiographical?

JRB: It's not not autobiographical. On an emotional level, it's very autobiographical. I had a really tragic first marriage, so that part is true. Knowing anything about my own biography, you can't watch the show and not see a lot of parallels, but the specifics aren't autobiographical.

Have audiences missed the point if they leave the show picking sides?

JRB: You can take from the show whatever you want. For me, the fun thing about the last eleven years is seeing how the reviews that do place blame are evenly split. Either Cathy's horrible and unsupportive or Jamie's a rotten philanderer. I've been able to rest comfortably knowing that I managed to write something balanced.

Can you still be surprised by fresh interpretations of the material?

JRB: I'm always open to being surprised, but I've always had a very specific thing in my mind about what this show is. I'm open to seeing what other people do with it, but it makes it a variation on what I wanted it to be — as opposed to the actual thing I wanted it to be.

A Conversation with the Director & Music Director: Kevin R. Free and Eddie Reichert

EDITED FOR CLARITY AND LENGTH BY JAE-YEON YOO

Kevin R. Free is a true multi-hyphenate artist. As a playwright, his works include *Night of the Living N-Word!*, *Face Value*, and *A Raisin in the Salad: Black Plays for White People*. As an actor, Kevin has appeared on off-Broadway, TV shows, commercials, feature films (including Bo Burnham's *Eighth Grade*), and regional theaters. He also is a prize-winning audio book reader. As a producer and arts administrator, he has worked as, among other positions, the former Producing Artistic Director of The Fire This Time Festival (a platform for early career playwrights of the African Diaspora), for which he won an Obie in 2015. As a director, he has directed numerous new works in New York and at regional theaters. Previously at Portland Stage (PS), Kevin has directed *Lady Day at Emerson's Bar & Grill*.

Eddie Reichert is an Affiliate Artist of PS. He is an experienced music director, vocal coach, and accompanist. He has had a long relationship with PS; highlights include: *Nunsense*, *The Irish...*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Loman Family Picnic*, and *Master Class*. In addition to his prolific work with PS and other regional theaters, Eddie is on the faculty in the School of Music at USM. Regional credits include: Walnut Street Theatre, North Shore Music Theatre, Seacoast Rep, The Fulton, Flat Rock Playhouse, Florida Rep, Ogunquit Playhouse, and Maine State Music Theatre. Additionally, Eddie conceived and directed the opening act for Joan Rivers' final appearance at Merrill Auditorium.

PlayNotes reached out to *The Last Five Years*' director, Kevin R. Free, and music director, Eddie Reichert, to chat about the show and their experiences with musical theater.

Jae-Yeon Yoo (JY): Hi Kevin and Eddie! Thanks for taking time to chat today. To begin with, what drew you to this particular show?

Eddie Reichert (ER): Well, in my teaching position at USM, I vocally coach a lot of musical theater majors. It happens so that *Songs for a New World*, *Parade*, and *The Last Five Years* [all shows by Jason Robert Brown] are high on the list of "cool" music for young people. This was a chance to see a production come alive, instead of just doing the songs. I've been waiting years to do a production of this!

Kevin R. Free (KRF): Dreams come true!

ER: ... be careful what you wish for. (Both laugh.)

KRF: I saw its off-Broadway premiere in 2002, and have been fascinated by it ever since. I too am surprised by the number of people who didn't see it originally, who are younger than I am, who are so into it. So I was really excited about being able to bring something to it, from my black gay lens.

ER: I didn't see the premiere, but I saw the [2013] revival. I was gobsmacked!

KRF: What made you so gobsmacked?

ER: The location of the orchestra, for one. They were against the entire height of the back wall. The musicians couldn't see each other; they were on their own little levels, platforms. Visually, it was beautiful, and of course the two performers were impressive.

JY: You both mentioned how this show is popular amongst the younger generation of theater-makers (and theater-goers). Why do you think this show has such a cult following, especially among millennials?

KRF: I think it has such a following because both of the characters are pretty unabashedly emotional. The music is exciting, it has really great "money notes" for the characters—it sounds like rock n' roll, without actually being rock n' roll.

ER: It's fresh. Even though it was written eighteen years ago, it's fresh and contemporary. The millennials can see themselves, I think, in the situations that Jamie and Cathy are in.

JY: Kevin, you mentioned bringing your own personal take to this show—what does this mean to you?

KRF: The intention is to humanize Jamie and Cathy. There's a difference in who we casted; we hoped to expand beyond your typical "Jamie" and "Cathy." So I didn't want to cast a busty blonde [for Cathy], or someone who is super slick [for Jamie]. I also wanted to highlight the exoticism of Jamie, explore his explicit desire to be with girls who are not Jewish. And I wanted Cathy's regression to be about someone who has really formed her own life, but then makes a couple of bad decisions. I wanted to explore giving her more agency than most other [depictions of Cathy] that I've seen, so she doesn't seem like just a "victim" or "weak."

JY: *That's great. It's something I'm personally really excited for in this production. I'd love to hear more about your personal experiences working on musicals. What excites you about them as an art form?*

ER: I've been doing mostly musicals all my life. They've been my livelihood since I was in college. [What excites me about musicals is] the process of bringing to life a piece. So normally, you're dealing with a whole set, choreographer, pit orchestra, ensemble, director. It's always an exciting process. And on top of this, there aren't a whole bunch of musicals for two people; this show is more personal, more intimate.

KRF: What excites me about musical theater is the opportunity we have to create big emotions. My mind was blown when I found out that singing in a musical is really about moving the scene forward. I learned that songs are about being able to emote without singing, that it's an escalation in the passion [and] objectives of an actor. I get excited by musical theater because of what it could be, and can be. And this [show] is a challenge because everything is sung. It's about creating a space that goes into the song, with the emotions that [the characters] create to go into these large, operatic feelings in the song. And I mean operatic, not as a reference to the genre of music, but in the epic scope of the music.

JY: *Do you have a favorite moment or song?*

ER: I want to answer this in two weeks, when we've lived with the music and the performers more.

KRF: Yeah, I'd agree.

JY: *Okay, how about just for this moment, today?*

KRF: "I'm A Part of That." It's just so pretty, and the emotions behind it are really complex.

ER: Right now, I would say that it's "Nobody Needs to Know," there's something so raw and tender and poignant. You want to know what I just heard that the day before yesterday, during the sing-through? If you stripped the songs of their lyrics, and you just heard the music from beginning to end, you would still have a story. You could make up the story by just listening to the music; there's such a clear story through just the accompaniment and orchestrations. If you had to attribute a color to each song, you'd have a markedly different color for each song—and then you have the luxury of adding the lyrics. The music is really powerful.

JY: *And lastly, a trick question—do you view yourself more as a Jamie or a Cathy?*

KRF: Definitely a Jamie.

JY: Why?

KRF: None of your business.

ER: I won't answer that question! I don't feel connected to either of them.



EDDIE REICHERT AND KEVIN R. FREE, PHOTO BY TODD BRIAN BACKUS.

Putting it Together: Interview with Set Designer, Meg Anderson

EDITED FOR CLARITY AND LENGTH BY REBECCA ROVEZZI



MEG ANDERSON.

This is Meg Anderson's sixth season at Portland Stage. She currently works as the props master. In addition to prop making, Meg is a scenic designer, sculptor, and theater artist. She is a graduate of the University of Puget Sound and has performed, devised, and designed works in Dublin, Tacoma, and Portland. She took some time to sit down with *Playnotes* editor, Rebecca Rovezzi, to discuss her approach to scenic design and some of the exciting elements audiences can look forward to seeing in *The Last Five Years*.

Rebecca Rovezzi (RR): *Could you tell me a little about your relationship with Portland Stage (PS) and your past design experiences?*

Meg Anderson (MA): Sure! This is now my sixth season working for Portland Stage. I came here as a scenic design intern and I was lucky enough to stay on in a staff position after the internship ended. My intern year there was no staff member in the shop with Ted [Portland Stage's Technical Director], so it was just Ted and I. I learned a lot very quickly and because of that I moved straight into a staff position. When I was working in the shop I did the scenic art and carpentry, which was great. I got a lot of experience working and painting with Anita. At that point, scenic art was what I hoped to do in the future. I also got to assist Anita on a design my intern year. We worked on *Veils* together and then I assisted her again my first staff year for *Our Man in Havana*. When I worked on *Veils* I primarily did all of Anita's drafting for her and when I did *Our Man in Havana* I did all the model making and drafting.

It was intense because communicating with the set designer, the director, and Ted is a weird middle step that doesn't exist when you're designing without an assistant. I learned a lot. Then the next season I did my first design on my own for *Hound of the Baskervilles*, which was great. The next year I moved into the props position [props master], and this is my third season as props master. The first year I did props I designed *Buyer and Cellar* which was also lovely and a great experience. Then I had an off year last year, I had an injury and wasn't able to do the design I was slotted to do. And now here we are doing *The Last Five Years!*

RR: *Could you talk me through your process as a scenic designer?*

MA: For me, the big question for this show was what is the machine for telling the story and how do we make it. It became clear that the machine is time. When we looked at our research there was one image that really spoke to both Kevin [R. Free, director] and I. It had a circular opening in it and that really formed the basis for us talking about the turntable as a way to show time moving within the play and for the main scenic element which is a wall with a portal opening within it. For me, the portal opening offered a solution for how you physically represent the idea of two people existing in the same space at two different times five years apart.

In terms of my general process. I read the play and make a big list of all the questions I have for the director and all the things that are mentioned [in the script], and what I think the play needs because what is described in the play isn't always what I do. Then, I have a conversation with the director about the play and what they feel like they need to tell the story. From there I make a giant amount of image research and I share that with them. I ask them to pick out images from that research that really jump out to them and if they have any image research of their own I ask for that. Then we talk about what seems like the most exciting ways to move forward. Then, I make a rough model to look at with them. I usually then revise the model until I lock it in and begin drafting.

RR: So, what's your favorite part of that process?

MA: That's such a good question. I really enjoy a lot of it. I love processes where I can meet with the director in person, which is why I don't design full-time. I don't love the processes that happen from afar, especially when there are so many abstract things to discuss. It takes a lot of time to make sure you're talking about exactly the same thing. But actually, the conversation between myself and the director where we decide how we're going to tell the story is the part I love and find most exciting.

RR: Does being Props Master in addition to Set Designer make your job as Set Designer easier or harder?

MA: Both. (Laughs). It's easy because you get to make all the choices. Usually when I'm doing props I'm talking to the director and the set designer and we're all deciding what it's going to be. But, now it's just me and Kevin which is great, but sometimes more stressful because I have to find the options and make the choice.

RR: Going back for a second that collaborative relationship between director and designer you were talking about- what are some qualities that a collaborator could possess that would make you excited to work with them?

MA: I always want the director to have an open mind about the world of the story. If a director comes in with a clear vision of what they want and what the world [of the play] looks like, sometimes that's less exciting. It's often kind of a red-flag because I feel like I am not that kind of designer. I think it's important to create a vocabulary between yourself [and your collaborators]. So, clear communication skills are always really important.

RR: Were you interested in Set Designing when you started the internship or was it something you came to after you arrived at PS?

MA: I think the internship has changed a little since I did it. It used to be marketed as partially a design internship which was a big pull. I have a liberal arts theater degree, a double major in performance and design, and when I was applying to internships I was accepted to a variety of programs. But I decided that this was the direction I wanted to move in. I think Portland has been a good place to work. There's not a big scenic design pool, so it's been a great place to get a lot of experience post-college.

RR: So were you in college when you first started designing?

MA: I worked in the scene shop in college for my work study hours. I had never really had any building experience before that. I grew up on farm and because of that the construction aspect felt like chores to me and was never interested in it as a kid. I've always been interested in painting. I was a sophomore in college when I did my first design for someone's thesis. While I was studying I realized that scenic design is a great way to tell the story. I became interested in it as part of the shared experience of theater. I think that storytelling should start the moment you enter the space. The set can do that visually physically, and viscerally in a way that is often underutilized. That was really cool idea to me in college that started me studying and working on [set design].

RR: What is your favorite element from *The Last Five Years*' set and/or what element are you most excited to see come to life?

MA: Seeing the reality of how we can use the turntable vs. us talking about it will be super helpful. I'm really excited about the two pieces that are more organic. I'm really interested in using more organic elements in my sets. I think that they help create an environment of immediacy that connects to the ritual of theater. We have this big paper fragmented piece and a big screen piece that has big organic metallic shapes on it. I'm excited to see them come to life and how they're going to be used because they're the most abstract elements we decided on.



DUSTIN TUCKER IN *BUYER AND CELLAR* AT PORTLAND STAGE,
PHOTO BY AARON FLACKE.

Meet the Cast

BY JAE-YEON YOO



Name: Johnny Shea

Character: Jamie

An ambitious, up-and-coming novelist living in Manhattan. His family is devoutly Jewish, and lives in the suburbs of NYC.

Favorite song in the show: "Nobody Needs to Know"

Favorite Portland restaurant: Empire



Name: Laura Darrell

Character: Cathy

An aspiring actress from an Irish Catholic family on the Eastern Shore (in Maryland). She moves to NYC in hopes of finding something better.

Favorite song in the show: A tie between "If I Didn't Believe in You" and "Summer in Ohio"

Favorite Portland restaurant: J's Oyster Bar

Timeline of *The Last Five Years*

BY REBECCA ROVEZZI

One of the most exciting aspects of *The Last Five Years* is its time-twisting narrative conceit of the show's central relationship: Cathy tells her story moving backward in time, starting with their breakup, while Jamie moves forward in time, starting with one of their first few dates. Let's take a closer look at the timeline of Jamie and Cathy's relationship in chronological order and gain some insight into what exactly transpires during their five-year relationship (Ex. [Chronological Order] Song Title: [(Show Order)])

1. "Goodbye Until Tomorrow" (#14)

Cathy is ecstatic after her first date with Jamie. After they say goodbye, she proclaims to the audience that she has been waiting for Jamie her whole life.

2. "Shiksa Goddess" (#2)

Jamie mirrors Cathy in his reaction to their first date. He is equally ecstatic over their budding romance. He shares that he has been waiting to fall in love with someone like Cathy.

3. "I Can Do Better Than That" (#12)

They have been dating for five months. Cathy is driving Jamie to meet her parents. She asks him to move in with her.

4. "Moving Too Fast" (#4)

Jamie receives the first big break in his career. He gets an agent and agrees to move in with Cathy.

5. "Climbing Uphill" (#10)

Cathy continues to face setbacks and rejections in her acting career and explains her struggles to her father over dinner.

6. "The Schmueel Song" (#6)

Jamie and Cathy's second Christmas together. He promises to support her and her career. He gives her new headshots, a subscription to *Backstage Magazine*, and a watch.

7. "When You Come Home to Me" (#9)

Cathy finally succeeds in an audition and lands her summer gig in Ohio.

8. "The Next Ten Minutes" (#8)

Jamie proposes to Cathy. They get married.

9. "A Summer in Ohio" (#7)

A newlywed Cathy tells Jamie about her experiences while at her summer theater gig in Ohio. She's excited for him to visit.

10. "A Miracle Would Happen" (#9)

Four months after getting married, Jamie complains to a friend about the temptations of other women, especially with his newfound success as an author. He calls Cathy and tells her he's proud of her and promises that he'll "be there soon."

11. "I'm a Part of That" (#5)

Six months later, Cathy attends a book-signing party for Jamie's latest novel. She describes what it's like to be married to Jamie and tries to convince herself that she is a part of his success despite her insecurities over her own career failings.

12. "If I Didn't Believe in You" (#11)

Jamie and Cathy get in a fight over attending another book-signing party. He accuses her of being unsupportive of his career just because her's is failing. Despite this, he still promises her that he believes in her.

13. "Nobody Needs to Know" (#13)

Near the end of their relationship, Jamie wakes up beside another woman. It becomes clear that he is having an affair (perhaps even multiple). He tells the woman that he going back to Ohio and "back into battle," presumably to see Cathy, and that he will be "swearing to her [Cathy] that I never was with you, and praying I'll hold you again." Jamie promises not to lie to this woman and tells her that "I could be in love with someone like you," just as he does with Cathy in "Shiksa Goddess."

14. "See I'm Smiling" (#3)

Eight months after "I'm a Part of That," Cathy is back in Ohio for another summer. Jamie has come to visit her, just as he tells the woman in "Nobody Needs to Know." He tells her he has to leave early to attend a party. She is hurt by this and, in response, she accuses him of cheating and choosing his own needs over hers.

15. "I Could Never Rescue You" (#14)

Three months later, Jamie makes the decision to leave Cathy. He writes her a letter explaining he has moved out of the apartment and leaves his wedding ring.

16. "Still Hurting" (#1)

Cathy comes home to discover the letter and the absence of Jamie's things. She laments the end of their relationship.

Societal Pressures to Stay Together

BY DYLAN GURRERA

Throughout *The Last Five Years*, we follow a romantic relationship that leads to marriage. While we see the isolation in their relationship, we also see how they idealize what life will be like as a married couple. Marriage's significance has morphed throughout history from a sacred religious institution to a contractual legal agreement for families to unite forces, from a purely patriarchal institution to a partnership founded on love and freedom, and now we even question the significance of marriage. However the definition changes, the cultural norm of long-term partnering remains significant in western culture. While many view this as a "natural" touchstone of growing up, scholars argue that, much like most human behavior, the social sanctions for sexuality and romance are products of human activity. In other words, the way we express ourselves romantically through interpersonal relationships is a learned behavior—a behavior that is imbued with politics, moral values, and cultural norms.

But nothing is purely historical; there are many examples of how our culture molds our romantic ideals from very early childhood. Karin A. Martin and Emily Kazyak studied romantic constructions in the highest grossing G-rated films produced from 1995 to 2005, and their findings are important to our understanding of the pervasiveness of heteronormativity. Heteronormativity is a social system that normalizes behaviors and societal expectations that are tied to heterosexuality. This topic is important because one of the prominent values in heteronormativity is the importance of monogamous (or one romantic partner as compared to multiple), procreative (or the ability to have children), and traditionally married couples. While many scholars believe that heteronormativity promotes the mundane or everyday-ness of such relationships, this study found something more substantial. From a very early age, companies like Disney teach us how traditional romantic goals are exceptional, powerful, transformative, and magical. For example, *Beauty and the Beast* shows how Belle's love literally transforms the Beast; Jasmine can ignore laws because her love is true in *Aladdin*; and a kiss has the magical ability to turn Prince Naveen back into a human in *The Princess and the Frog*.

These films pose romantic relationships as the ultimate "happily ever after" that both men and women need in order to become their truest selves.

Sociologist Henry A. Giroux offers us the following analysis: "The role that Disney plays in shaping individual identities and controlling fields of social meaning through which children negotiate the world is far too complex to be simply set aside as a form of reactionary politics." In his article, *Animated Youth: The Disneyfication of Youth Culture*, Giroux evaluates how Disney transfers its own conservative views through its representations of heteronormative relationships, chauvinistic female characters, and many other topics. If Martin, Kazyak, and Giroux are correct, then we can extrapolate their findings to assume that Disney also influence how men and women should operate within their relationships. Many of these G-rated films portray a romantic ideal of female sacrifice and docility. Ariel must lose her voice and her entire life in order to pursue romance; Belle is imprisoned in the Beast's house to save her father; in *Tangled*, Rapunzel promises to stay in a lifetime captivity if she's allowed to heal Flynn. Just like these Disney characters, Cathy's "I'm a Part of That" romanticizes her catering to Jamie's needs rather than pursuing her own. What happens when we see a woman "follow in his stride," as Cathy does? When we tell young people that women must sacrifice everything in order to save their male counterpart, how does that affect both men's and women's perceptions of their roles in a relationship? While Martin and Kazyak didn't find the full extent, it does claim that "these films provide powerful portraits of a multifaceted and pervasive heterosexuality that likely facilitates the reproduction of heteronormativity."

While Martin and Kazyak's study does not specify the extent to which individuals incorporate these films into their understanding of relationships, other studies provide more information about how children incorporate these films' romantic and gendered expectations. For example, Giroux's 1996 study found that the mass market invites children to incorporate films into their creative and imaginative play. Stores regularly display toys, clothing, and costumes that either directly or indirectly represent Disney stories.

Incorporating themes found in stories like *Tangled*, *Little Mermaid*, and others allows children to practice and fantasize about the romantic ideals of damsels in distress, transforming to meet the needs of your partner, and the idea that we need romance in order to have our happily ever after. This incorporation transforms the way children interact imaginatively with themselves and their peers, and Joseph Tobin's study in 2000 argues that this incorporation is linked to both play and learning. If children learn and practice certain behaviors, we might expect them to unquestioningly normalize the exceptional power of romance and marriage, sacrificing professional or social goals for romantic goals—behaviors that we do see in our everyday world.

Though our culture and commercial world dictate our relationships, the largest way children assimilate into our cultural norms (or not) is our relationships to our parental figures and our peers. *The Last Five Years* reflects this psychological finding as we watch Cathy build her concepts of what a relationship should or shouldn't be based on her peers' experiences. In "I Can Do Better than That," Cathy reflects on some of the relationships she has seen and discusses their failures or shortcomings that she will not repeat. While child development specialists like Walker, Hennig, and Krettenaur find an ambiguity in exactly how these two different groups—parents and peers—influence us, they do find that both serve as fundamental ways in which individuals develop their opinions on concepts such as romance and marriage.

Jennifer Jackl discovered information on how newlyweds construct marital values based on important messages they received from their parents. In her study, *Love doesn't just happen...*, Jackl found three prominent messages: (1) marriage means a lifelong commitment; (2) marriage means work; and (3) traditional values of marriage are often based on traditional gender roles, like men serving as the breadwinners while women are in charge of the domestic sphere. When she discussed these values with participants, the newlyweds agreed that these were messages that they received from their parents. From Jackl's study, we see that we inherit the values within marriage from previous generations. If we extrapolate these findings about parental influence over marital values, we could most likely conclude that parents also pass down the importance of achieving marital status over the course of their children's lives.

Individuals receive many messages about romantic values from many institutions: our families, mass media, and even our own play-spaces. The pervasiveness of a narrative that inflates the power marriage holds over our pursuit of happiness and wholeness presents itself as a societal norm. By practicing, fantasizing, and romanticizing how love will change our lives, we learn and pass down these values to future generations who, in turn, will unquestioningly agree to the everyday-ness and the exceptional power of romance. However, as Gayle Rubin states, all human behavior is the product of human behavior. In other words, marriage and romance doesn't naturally hold such significance—we have learned to give them that power without critically analyzing why we do so.

But relationships can't be all bad; there are countless examples of healthy relationships and marriages. While culture, and our group affiliations influence our opinions on how we might act within a relationship, there are specific benefits to being within a relationship. Adrienne Frech and Kristi Williams' study found psychological benefits for a relationship transitioning into marriage. In their study, they found that, on the average, both non-depressed individuals as well as depressed individuals experienced higher psychological well-being (measured by lower rates of depression, substance abuse, and alcoholism) as they transitioned into marriage. They concluded that long-term partnering and cohabitation offer an individual emotional support, day-to-day companionship, and decreased periods of social isolation. These scholars note that every relationship is different, but that, on the whole, healthy relationships offer such benefits.

Relationships can be complex; they are social, cultural, and deeply personal. Usually, the power that we give them are values we have unconsciously learned and practiced since we were children. While these values teach us of the natural and exceptional power of marriage and long-term, monogamous relationships, understanding how society teaches certain values will allow us to question the romantic narratives we experience in everyday life or on the stage. Understanding how we have come to value romance and partnership, we begin to analyze whether we, as Cathy sings, "will never be alive...until I do," or if we need to chase our own dreams.

Post Show Activities

BY EMILY LAWRENCE AND PAIGE FARLEY

1. *The Last Five Years* starts at the end of the relationship for Cathy and moves backward, and at the beginning of the relationship for Jamie, moving forward. What was the effect of this type of nonlinear storyline? Imagine you are rewriting the play, putting all the events in order. Create a timeline of their relationship. In groups discuss whether this order of events makes the relationship more or less compelling. Why do you think Jason Robert Brown decided to arrange the story in the order he did?

2. Portland Stage's production utilizes a turntable in the production to signify the passing of time. Imagine you are designing the sets, costumes, or lighting for *The Last Five Years*. Create a sketch of one design element. How would your chosen design element signify the passing of time?

3. Imagine you are creating a poster design for this show. Think about what images, colors, and ideas come to mind when you think about the show? Create a poster that would draw the audience in while also showing them what the play will be about. Think about the overall tone, themes, and ideas expressed in the play. Share your posters with the rest of the class.

4. *The Last Five Years* tells the same story from two different perspectives: the audience watches Cathy react to things in her and Jamie's relationship, and watches Jamie react to the same situations in very different ways. Listen to the song "The Next Ten Minutes" which tells the story of their engagement and wedding. What do you notice about the way Jamie views their relationship versus the way Cathy views it? After listening to "The Next Ten Minutes" create a character profile for who you think Cathy is, and who you think Jamie is—what are some of their defining characteristics? Who has the power in the relationship? What is different about the way Jamie portrays the relationship versus the way Cathy portrays it? What does this suggest about how we view people and how we tell stories?

5. In *The Last Five Years*, Jamie creates the story "The Story of Schmu-el, Tailor of Klimovich." Listen to "The Schmu-el Song" and act out the story of Schmu-el the seamstress in pairs. How is your perception of the song changed by seeing the action of the story played out? In small groups, create a short play about Schmu-el's life. What happened before the clock changed his life? How did he get to where he is at the beginning of the story?



OLD TAILOR BY ITZHAK HOLTZ.

Storytelling Through Music

BY JAE-YEON YOO

Just as plays have intertextual references and wordplay through their language, musicals have a similar way of heightening – or undercutting, foreshadowing, and referencing – narrative through music composition techniques. In addition to lyrics and dialogue, music uses elements such as meter, vocal lines, chord progressions, modulation, and leitmotifs. Here we'll look at a few key examples of those in Jason Robert Brown's *The Last Five Years*.

Meter & Rhythm:

The definition of “meter” is how many beats are in one measure, or how we feel a piece “grooves.” An overarching, bigger-scale example of meter in storytelling is how both Jamie and Cathy's narratives start in more grounded, beat-heavy meters with four or two beats per measure, such as “Shiksa Goddess” and “Moving Too Fast” (the chronological start of Jamie's story), or “Goodbye Until Tomorrow” and “I Can Do Better Than That” (the chronological start of Cathy's story). Those meters – 2/4 and 4/4 – are typical to rock and pop music. In contrast to their beginnings, both narratives end in 3/4 (with “I Could Never Rescue You” and “Still Hurting”). 3/4, where there are three beats per measure, has a more lyrical, reminiscent pulse; it automatically reminds most listeners of waltzes, conjuring a more romantic or haunting atmosphere.

Meter and rhythm are deeply connected to how listeners may subconsciously “feel” something viscerally. If a song constantly has phrases that start off the downbeat, we're likely to sense that something is off-kilter, that things aren't lining up squarely – even without context. An example of this is the beginning of “See I'm Smiling.” The off-beats make it sound as if Cathy is taking a breath every time before she speaks, which creates a sense of hesitancy. Therefore, by beginning each phrase on an off-beat, Brown emphasizes Cathy's doubt about the state of their relationship (that explodes later on in the song) – subtly undercutting the seemingly happy lyrics.

Questions to ask when analyzing meter:

- Where is the beat? What is the “groove” of the song like?
- What words land squarely on the beat?
- What phrases are consistently off the beat?
- If the meter is irregular (like in “The Schmueel Song”), why? What are possible reasons?

Chord Progressions & Key Modulation:

Key modulations are when a musical key changes from one to another; it's often used in musical theater as a way to express a switch in mindset. Brown's songs contain many key changes, keeping the song's internal movement dynamic. An example of this is “Moving Too Fast,” which keeps escalating – reflecting Jamie's career skyrocketing, higher and higher, as the music similarly modulates upwards.

Like key modulations, chord progressions can also give clues into a character's emotional state of being. Dissonant chord progressions (harmonies that sound jarring, unexpected, and/or not “pretty”) can help highlight moments or words that are filled with tension. One example of this is “See I'm Smiling.” As Cathy grows angrier and angrier, the chords get more and more dissonant.

Questions to ask when analyzing chord progressions/modulations:

- When does a song modulate key? And if so, why? Is there a mindset or narrative shift that fuels this change?
- If a passage sounds particularly dissonant (jarring, unexpected harmony) or consonant (soothing, predictable, stable harmony), why? What are the lyrics with those chord progressions?

Vocal lines:

Given that the two characters hardly ever sing together, there is a lot happening symbolically when they do. One of Brown's trademarks is ending his duets together on the same note, in unison. In *The Last Five Years*, we find this to be true in both “The Next Ten Minutes” and the end of the musical in “Goodbye Until Tomorrow/I Could Never Rescue You.”

The two points in the musical in which the characters are in unison are 1) at their wedding, the only point in time where they overlap, and 2) the last word “Goodbye,” which gives the ending a sense of finality—and, at the same time, circularity.

Questions to ask when analyzing vocal lines:

- Are the actors singing the same rhythms and same words?
- When do they sing in unison and when do they sing separate lines simultaneously?
- Are their harmonies consonant or dissonant?

Leitmotifs:

Leitmotifs—a German word literally translated as “leading themes”—are present in all our favorite TV shows and movies. They’re a simple way to make an aural connection between the action that is happening and an overarching, reoccurring theme. (Think of the *Star Wars* central theme that appears whenever Luke is discovering or using his powers, or Hedwig’s theme in the *Harry Potter* movies that comes up whenever Harry is interacting with magic.) They’re usually short, catchy phrases without words—not a whole song. Because they establish these connections between a theme and music, leitmotifs can also help develop the musical narrative as a show moves along, reminding the audience of what has happened before.

At the end of the article are three examples of one leitmotif that appears and develops throughout *The Last Five Years*. The leitmotif development helps illustrate the subtext of the narrative. We are first introduced to it in the very beginning of “Still Hurting.”

The phrase—a total of two measures, is repeated twice in Ex. 1. It establishes the atmosphere of Cathy’s grief; we start to associate this leitmotif with the end of Cathy and Jamie’s marriage because that’s what “Still Hurting” is about.

Below in Ex.2, we see this leitmotif appear again at the end of “I’m a Part of That.” It’s modulated into a different key and time signature, but the overall effect is the same, with its pulse of three beats, held out notes on each beat, and the exact same chord progressions.

Audience ears will remember that progression from earlier on—subconsciously or consciously. The leitmotif serves to foreshadow how, although Cathy might be trying to convince herself she is a part of Jamie’s world, the foundations of their relationship are cracking apart.

The phrase shows up for the last time near the end of “If I Didn’t Believe in You.” It (Ex. 3) is also in the same key and octave as Ex. 2. This time, Jamie is trying to convince himself (and Cathy) that their relationship can work out, that he does believe in her; yet, the leitmotif echoes the idea that his efforts will be in vain, that the end is near. Ex. 3’s piercing, sustained high note (the E-flat first played on the piano, then doubled by the violin) helps intensify the tension we feel.

Questions to ask when analyzing leitmotifs:

- What musical phrases (not lyrics) are repeated throughout this show?
- When do they appear? Are they exactly the same each time? If they are different (such as a major leitmotif being repeated in a minor version), why?
- Once you find repeated phrases, what could they symbolize? How does this connect to the narrative?

References & Musical “Quotations”:

Everyone can tell when someone is quoting or referencing Shakespeare. Shakespearean English has distinctive words, like “thou” and “wherefore” and “O,” that alerts the audience that it is a different, borrowed style. It works similarly in music, although we might not be as consciously and immediately aware of it. Brown quotes and utilizes many different musical styles throughout the piece—to pay homage (as he does to Jerome Kern’s ballads with Cathy’s audition piece), to render something comical or satirical (as he does in “A Summer in Ohio”), or to reference a specific type of music that is relevant to the narrative content. He mixes and mashes together all sorts of genres, from pop to jazz to classical musical theater.

One example of musical “quoting” for content emphasis is in “Shiksa Goddess.” First off, the song is all about the appeal of the exotic *shiksa* (see Glossary page 27) Brown writes in that the tempo should have a “Latin feel,” with a syncopated groove that obviously borrows from those traditions.

The musical composition itself is an embodiment of what Jamie is striving for – an escape from a more classic style of musical theater composition and a foray into the “ethnic.” Then, after measure 100, the song turns into a full-on rock anthem with a “rock-n-roll feel.” If we interpret these musical clues as character analysis, it’s as if Jamie’s quest for the “ethnic” has enabled him to feel like a rock star.

Within this song, there is also a different kind of quoting. After the lyric about “the Handelman twins,” we hear a violin riff that immediately evokes “Jewishness” à la *Fiddler on the Roof*. The official genre of this music is classified as Klezmer; it has its roots in Eastern Europe Jewish tradition. It emphasizes the extremely Jewish community that Jamie is bemoaning, and, by mimicking Klezmer, also pokes fun at Jamie’s (and Brown’s) own cultural heritage. Brown continues to use these references throughout the show (listen to “The Schmuel Song”).

Lastly, Brown not only references other music styles, but also references other songs within this specific work. A clear example is the parallel between “See I’m Smiling” and “I Can Do Better Than That.”

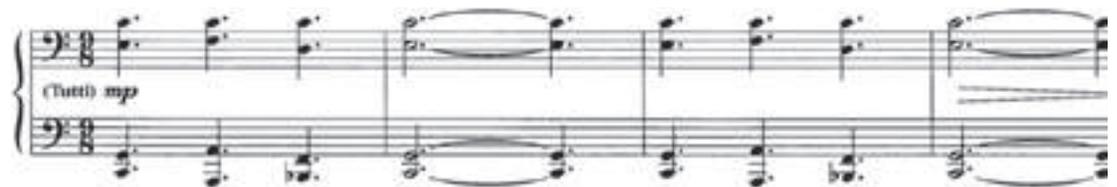
There is a section in both songs where Cathy sings about “You and you and nothing but you / Miles and piles of you.” However, the lyrics and major key of “I Can Do Better Than That” are all peppy and gloriously joyous, while the lyrics and dissonant chords of “See I’m Smiling” build up into an emotional breaking point. By self-referencing and obviously pointing out the change from “upset Cathy” to “happy Cathy,” Brown heightens the drama of the piece.

Questions to ask when analyzing musical references:

- Is there a section that feels like it’s borrowed or familiar from something else?
- If so, what is this music referencing? And why?
- Does anything within the musical get self-referenced later on? For what purpose?

As shown above, the world of music analysis is just as complex and complete as that of words – we simply need to learn what tools we can use in order to examine it!

EXAMPLE 1.



EXAMPLE 2.



EXAMPLE 3.



Nonlinear Storytelling in Literature

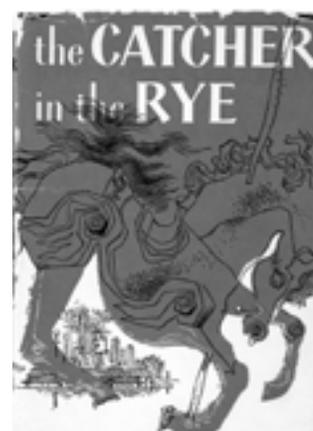
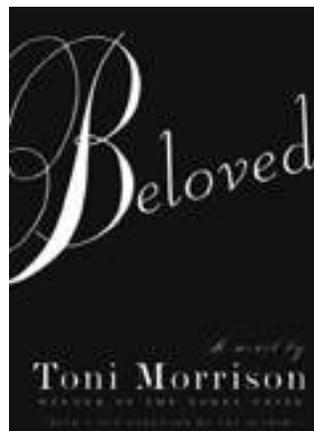
BY EMILY LAWRENCE

Nonlinear narratives are stories that are told in a non-chronological order. Linear plot lines follow this structure: A, then B, then C, and finally D. Nonlinear plots, however, can present the information in a variety of ways: C, then A, then D, and finally B (for example). Flashbacks, parallel narratives, flash-forwards, and time shifts are all encompassed in the definition of nonlinear structures. The main component of a nonlinear storyline is that it disrupts the natural “cause and effect” system we are trained to expect from a story. Psychologically, humans prefer linear storylines—our natural default is to put events in chronological order, and we prefer when the story is told in chronological order because it minimizes the amount of work we have to do. We view our lives as a series of actions, causes, and effects, and we expect the stories we experience to follow that same structure. However, nonlinear storylines, when constructed correctly, can provide just enough disruption that it causes us to critically analyze the events in the story while we put together the order of the story. If a story veers too far from the linear plot structure, audiences lose interest and stop trying to put the pieces together. It’s a fine line that authors, playwrights, and storytellers have been walking for thousands of years, and it’s one that Jason Robert Brown walked as he wrote *The Last Five Years*.

Nonlinear storylines can take many different forms—they aren’t all just a seemingly random mix of scenes from different times in the characters’ lives. The most basic form of non-linear storylines is the use of flashbacks. Many classic novels and popular modern-day books use this format to help justify their characters’ actions or to explain elements of the characters’ personalities that would otherwise be hard to understand. In other words, flashbacks are often used to make the character more three-dimensional, well-rounded, or empathetic. Some novels use flashbacks only occasionally throughout their mostly-linear stories, while others use flashbacks as the primary method of storytelling.

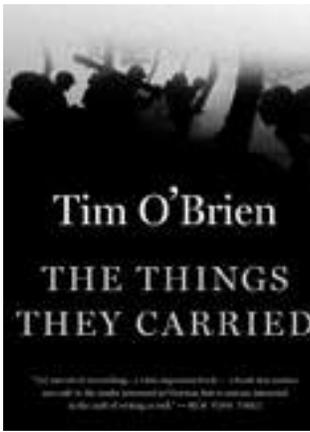
One example of a classic nonlinear novel is Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, which is told primarily through a series of fragmented memories and flashbacks. Sethe, the main character of *Beloved*, is a former enslaved person living in a haunted house in Cincinnati, Ohio.

When she is visited by a man from her past, Paul D., she takes a trip down memory lane, remembering both the good and bad parts of her life. The flashbacks are told not just from her perspective, but also from the perspectives of the other characters, which means that sometimes memories are repeated multiple times, with each retelling revealing another aspect to the story that wasn’t revealed previously. While the lack of linear structure can be confusing at times, *Beloved*’s unique nonlinear structure allows the reader to learn about both the horrors and the triumphs in Sethe’s life. The nonlinear storyline creates a very full, very realistic character who is not defined by any one part of her life but is instead a complex person who has been shaped by her experiences into the person she is in the present. Had *Beloved* been written in a linear style, the character would have perhaps been less well-rounded and less empathetic to the audience.



BELLOVED AND THE CATCHER IN THE RYE BOOK COVERS.

Beloved is a great example of a classic novel that utilizes flashbacks as the main method of storytelling but it certainly isn’t the only classic novel to have used this format. Other famous works that utilize flashbacks include *Catch-22*, which uses the same method of telling the same stories from multiple perspectives that *Beloved* uses; *Catcher in the Rye*, which is told almost exclusively through narrated flashbacks; and *The Things they Carried*, another novel that describes the lives of soldiers during the Vietnam War. Many classic novels use flashbacks as a literary tool, and many of them are successful because of their nonlinear plots.



THINGS THEY CARRIED AND CRIME AND PUNISHMENT BOOK COVERS.

Aside from helping build stronger characters, nonlinear storylines can also help build suspense in a novel. Often, crime novels will use flashbacks to tease parts of the story, revealing small chunks of information at a time, usually as suspects or witnesses help fill in the gaps of the story. This type of structure is often used on crime television shows, too; through a series of flashbacks and memories, the audience is able to piece together what happened, who was involved, and the motivating factors behind the characters' actions. A classic example of this approach is in *Crime and Punishment* by Fyodor Dostoevsky. In *Crime and Punishment*, the main character, Rodion Raskolnikov, plans and executes the murder of a local broker. The book begins just before the act and follows Raskolnikov as he deals with the aftermath of his actions, feeling guilty and morally conflicted about how best to absolve himself. While the majority of the novel is told in a linear structure, Dostoevsky uses memory flashbacks and time shifts as a way of increasing tension, creating a sense of chaos, and ultimately engaging the reader to the very end as Raskolnikov struggles with whether or not to turn himself in to the police. Though Dostoevsky was slightly ahead of his time, other authors soon followed his example and used nonlinear plots to increase the stakes and the tension within their novels. Nonlinear stories, when constructed properly, can make the audience feel as though they are rushing towards the big climactic ending, where all will be revealed and the memories will all fit together in a cohesive story.

Nonlinear plots, used for both character development and to increase tension, are also popular in plays. One common type of play is a "memory play," in which a character reflects on an event or part of their lives, and shows the audience different pieces of their memory.

As with novels, these memories can be linear, but often include time shifts both within the memories and jumping between memory and present-day. These types of memory plays help create deeper characters and a sense of tension as the audience slowly learns more and more about the character who is relating the memory. One famous example of this type of play is *The Glass Menagerie* by Tennessee Williams. In *The Glass Menagerie*, the main character, Tom, shows us his memories of his final few months living at home with his mother and his younger sister, Laura. The audience watches as Tom struggles with his desire to escape the constricting life he is living as the main breadwinner for his family while also struggling with the idea of leaving Laura, who has a medical condition and no good marriage or job prospects. The audience knows from the beginning that Tom ultimately chose to leave his family, but the memories he shows the audience help to explain why he left, and help to make him a more relatable, empathetic character.



THE THREE ACTORS WHO PORTRAYED ALISON IN THE ORIGINAL BROADWAY CAST OF FUN HOME.

A more modern example of a nonlinear play is the popular Broadway musical *Fun Home*. *Fun Home*, based on the life of cartoonist and author Alison Bechdel, shows Bechdel struggling to figure out who is she at 43 and struggling to come to terms with her past and her family. Told through the structure of adult Alison looking back at her life so she can draw her life in cartoons, the audience sees fragments of her life: from 10-year-old Alison playing with her brothers in their family's funeral home, to teenage Alison's discovery of her sexuality and struggle to come out to her parents, to her father's increasingly erratic behavior as she grew up. The musical jumps from one memory to the next without regard to chronological order, but, throughout the course of the play, the audience gains an understanding of what Alison's life was like.

Including the moments that are painful for her to remember and events that are clearer to her now than when she was a child. The nonlinear structure of the musical aids in the audience's understanding of how Alison's childhood has shaped her into the person she is.



A CHRISTMAS CAROL AT PORTLAND STAGE,
PHOTOGRAPH BY AARON FLACKE.

While *The Glass Menagerie* and *Fun Home* are two famous examples of plays with nonlinear structure, this kind of plotline can be seen in many plays, both new and old. Just this season at Portland Stage alone, we have produced three nonlinear plays. In November of 2018, Portland Stage produced a new work called *Refuge Malja* ملجا, which explored the memories of the main character, Jamie, as she struggled with what to do with an orphaned refugee child. *Refuge Malja* ملجا included many time shifts and explored her memories in a nonlinear order, which allowed the audience to slowly gain an understanding of why she felt so connected to the young refugee child. Then, in December of 2018, Portland Stage produced Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, which centers around Ebenezer Scrooge as he travels to the past, present, and future to learn the error of his ways and to make him a better person. This play uses a type of nonlinear storyline called parallel narratives, which means that there are two plots: Plot A is overarching plot, and Plot B is the subplot, which helps to resolve Plot A. In *A Christmas Carol*, Plot A is the present-day, where Ebenezer Scrooge is a mean old miser who is being visited by three different ghosts. Plot B is his journey into the past, present, and future. As with the use of flashbacks, parallel narratives can help add suspense and tension, because the audience slowly learns things from Plot B to guess how it will affect Plot A.

Finally, Portland Stage's most recent new work production, *The Half-Light* by Monica Wood, also follows a nonlinear plot, as most of the play is told through flashbacks and memories, rather than being told in a linear fashion. As with *The Glass Menagerie*, the memories in *The Half-Light* are told in a linear fashion, but are told within the narrative structure of a memory, which makes *The Half-Light* a nonlinear play. There are also significant time shifts in *The Half-Light*, which are made possible by the nonlinear structure. Nonlinear stories are all around us, and you don't have to go too far to find them!



THE HALF-LIGHT AT PORTLAND STAGE,
PHOTOGRAPH BY AARON FLACKE.

Nonlinear stories have been told for generations, and are useful in helping us shake up the normal methods of storytelling. When constructed poorly, nonlinear plots can be confusing, frustrating, and disengaging, but when they are constructed properly, they can help add tension, suspense, and character development to the play, novel, or television show you are experiencing. The next time you read a novel, ask yourself this question: Is this novel linear or nonlinear? How is my experience of this novel changed by the plot structure the author used? Once you start looking for nonlinear storylines, you might discover that they are more common than you would ever have expected.

Glossary

THE LAST FIVE YEARS IN THE CLASSROOM

BY JAE-YEON YOO



RITA MORENO AS ANITA IN THE WEST SIDE STORY FILM.

Anita: One of the supporting characters in *West Side Story*, a musical theater classic.

Aphrodite: The Greek goddess of love and beauty.

Atlantic Monthly: Founded in 1857, it is one of the most well-established and respected magazines in the US. It publishes news, opinion pieces, and literature. It is now just called *The Atlantic*.

Backstage: A magazine and online platform aimed for people working in film and theater; it specializes in casting, job opportunities, and industry tips.

Columbia: A highly regarded, Ivy League university in NYC. It offers an MFA in Creative Writing, which is most likely the program Jamie is referring to.

Daisy Mae: A central character in the cartoon strip, *Li'l Abner* (which ran from 1934-1977). She was known for “her voluptuous charms (much of it visible daily thanks to her trademark polka-dot peasant blouse).”



DAISY MAE.

The Dakota: A NYC historic landmark, the Dakota is a beautiful apartment complex located in the Upper West Side.

It has had many famous residents, including John Lennon. Lennon was assassinated in the archway of the Dakota in 1980.

Duran Duran: A popular 1980s-1990s new wave/synth-pop British band. They are still active today.



Gotti clan: The Gotti clan is most infamous for its involvement with the Gambino crime family—one of the “Five Families” that has run organized crime in NYC, beginning in the 1910s. John Joseph Gotti, Jr. was an Italian American gangster who eventually became boss of the entire Gambino crime family. He passed the title down to his son.

Grand Fromage: Literally translates to “big cheese” (from French); used as a synonym for “big shot,” “important person,” “boss,” etc.

“Had a tattoo”: There is a commonly regarded taboo against body ink and tattoos in Jewish culture.



HEBREW SCHOOL.

Hebrew school: The Jewish equivalent of Christianity’s “Sunday school,” it is a religious education program for Jewish youth. They learn about Judaism and Hebrew; Hebrew school education dates all the way back to the 1800s.



MANHATTAN JCC.

JCC: Abbreviations for “Jewish Community Center,” which is a national organization. JCCs offer Jewish programming, such as Hebrew classes or Jewish holiday activities; they also often function as a community center.

Jerry Seinfeld: A famous comedian. He used to live in a historic luxury apartment (the Beresford) in the Upper West Side. Jamie is most likely referring to the view of Seinfeld's apartment, as he and Cathy walk in Central Park.

John Lennon: A member of the Beatles who resided for a time in the Upper West Side (at the Dakota, see above). Again, Jamie is probably pointing out where John Lennon lived. However, there is also a John Lennon monument in Central Park, Strawberry Fields, which is a 2.5 acre of land that is a quiet zone and has an "Imagine" mosaic.



STRAWBERRY FIELDS IN CENTRAL PARK.

"Leave It to Beaver": The title of a 1950s black-and-white sitcom about middle-class American boyhood. The central family of the sitcom, the Cleavers, have become icons for an idealized suburban family. Now, there is also an additional layer of longing for "simpler times" and the olden days when this show is referenced.



CAST OF "LEAVE IT TO BEAVER."



MONA LISA.

Mona Lisa: World-famous painting by Leonardo DaVinci; the painting's subject is renowned for her mysterious smile.

Mr. Ed: An American television sitcom that aired in the 60s. The title character is a talking horse.



AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY.

Museum with dinosaurs: Since they are in Central Park, Jamie is most likely alluding to the American Museum of Natural History, which is next to the park. It is one of the largest natural history museums in the world and does indeed have many dinosaur fossils.

"My people have suffered for thousands of years": Jews have continually endured persecution; the most horrific example is the Holocaust, but anti-Semitism is deeply ingrained in Western culture throughout the ages.

Nirvana: Cathy is most likely referring – ironically – to the state of "nirvana" (not the band), which is a word of Buddhist origin defined as "a place or state characterized by freedom from or oblivion to pain, worry, and the external world."

Porgy: A central character from *Porgy and Bess*, a folk opera by George Gershwin.

Random House: An American publishing house established in 1927. As their website lists, they are the "world's largest print and digital trade book publisher" today.



BOOKSHELVES OF RANDOM HOUSE HEADQUARTERS IN NEW YORK CITY.



VIEW OF THE SAN REMO FROM CENTRAL PARK.

San Remo: A luxury apartment building with 27 floors that is also located in the Upper West Side, overlooking Central Park and a block away from the Dakota. It is regularly the home of famous celebrities—including musical theater giant Stephen Sondheim

Shabbos dinners: Shabbos, or Shabbat, is the holy day of rest in Jewish tradition. It begins on Friday night at sundown and lasts until Saturday sundown. As Tori Avey defines, “Shabbat traditionally includes three required meals: Friday night dinner, Saturday lunch, and the third meal in late afternoon. For non-Orthodox Jews, Friday night dinner is the most popular Shabbat meal. Typical Shabbat foods include challah and wine, which are both blessed before the meal begins.”

Shiksa: A non-Jewish girl or woman, usually used in the context of a Jewish man’s non-Jewish love interest. Despite the term’s popularity, it has negative connotations of exoticification.

Sonny Mehta: The current editor-in-chief of Alfred A. Knopf, a renowned publishing house. Mehta has been called the world’s most influential Anglophone publisher.



SONNY MEHTA,
PHOTO BY JOYCE RAVID.

Spring Valley: Spring Valley is a suburban area near NYC. (There’s an actual JCC in Spring Valley—check out JCC Rockland.)

Summer stock: The kind of theater that only operates in the summer. There is summer stock theater in areas that do not always have a full-time repertory company (such as in suburban Ohio, where Cathy is). The tradition of summer stock dates all the way to the 1920s; summer stock roles are typically viewed as a starting point for professional actors.



OHIO VALLEY SUMMER THEATER,
PHOTO BY KENNEDY CANTRELL.

Tevye: The central protagonist of *Fiddler on the Roof*, a musical theater classic about the struggles of a Russian Jewish family.

Travelogue: A piece of writing about travel(s).

Tsuris: Trouble or woe; aggravation.

“Wandering through the desert”: Jamie is most likely alluding to Moses, an Old Testament figure, who led his people through the desert to reach the Promised Land (promised by God to the Jewish people). By making this reference, Jamie implies that Cathy is his Promised Land.

Washington Heights: A Northern district in NYC; it used to be known as “Frankfurt-on-the-Hudson” for its dense population of German Jews. There is still a vibrant Jewish community there today.



NEW YORK CITY SKYLINE.

In Adaptation: From Stage to Screen

BY REBECCA ROVEZZI

Since *The Last Five Years*' premiere at Chicago's Northlight Theatre in 2001 and subsequent off-Broadway production in 2002, it has had numerous productions both in the United States and internationally. Following in the footsteps of many commercially successful stage musicals, *The Last Five Years* was adapted into a highly anticipated film starring Anna Kendrick and Jeremy Jordan, which was released in early 2015 (just in time for Valentine's Day). It was adapted and directed by Richard LaGravenese. Kendrick's performance was met with widespread critical acclaim, with many citing it as the best performance of her career. The review aggregator website Rotten Tomatoes reported a 59% approval rating, based on 84 reviews, with an average rating of 6.2/10. The site's critical consensus states, "*The Last Five Years* hits a few awkward notes in its transition from stage to screen, but its freshness and sincere charm – and well-matched stars – offer their own rewards."

The Last Five Years is a recent addition to the long list of productions that have been given the Hollywood treatment. Not only are more musical-to-movie adaptations being made, but they are achieving comparable success to movies with original screenplays. Turning stage musicals into movies is not exactly a 21st century development, as the practice actually dates back well into the mid-20th century. The 1960s was a particularly fruitful decade for the musical movie genre with four adaptations – *West Side Story*, *My Fair Lady*, *The Sound of Music*, and *Oliver!* – winning Best Picture at the Academy Awards. Recently, stage-to-screen adaptations have hit a new upward trend, both in terms of the number produced and in their critical reception.

One tendency that has remained fairly consistent since the inception of movie musicals is the use of actors with household names in principal roles. As with any movie – musical adaptation or not – the filmmaker's goal is accessibility and marketability. But filmmakers tasked with bringing a Broadway show to Hollywood have an extra step to consider: they have the unique challenge not only of honoring an existing script and score, but also making the film as appealing as possible to viewers who may never have been exposed to the original stage musical.



JASON ROBERT BROWN, JEREMY JORDAN,
AND RICHARD LAGRAVENESE.

For example, when adapting *My Fair Lady*, producers chose to cast Audrey Hepburn in the leading role, despite the fact she could not sing the part, for the number of moviegoers her presence would draw to the cinemas.

The Last Five Years' long-awaited translation from stage to screen resulted in several changes from its original form. LaGravenese went to great lengths to preserve the text of the musical, and he worked closely with playwright and composer Jason Robert Brown on his adaptation. The music went virtually unchanged, save for a few updated lyrics. Quite a bit of swearing was cut to get a PG-13 rating. Three other changes to make the plot feel more contemporary; instead of comparing an ex to Tom Cruise in "I Can Do Better Than That," Cathy describes him as someone with "very well-placed tattoos"; Borders is changed to Target in "A Summer in Ohio"; and there's an added dig at Russell Crowe in "Climbing Uphill." Neither Brown nor Kendrick will take credit for the line change "These are the people who cast Russell Crowe in a musical," Brown jokes, "in case the actor comes to hunt one of them down." The movie is otherwise exceptionally faithful to the stage version; LaGravenese added virtually no dialogue and even chose not to include title cards explaining which year each scene takes place. LaGravenese's ultimate intent was to create "a mosaic of Jamie and Cathy's relationship." As a result, audiences of the film were forced to buy into the idea that it's all about the journey rather than the destination.

The few changes that were made became the most common critique of the film. The musical, as presented on stage, is a two-person show, with no other actors appearing other than the central figures, Jamie and Cathy.

Additionally, it consists almost exclusively of solo numbers; Jamie and Cathy alternate songs, and almost never sing together. They are frequently not even present while the other character sings. This gives each character space to present their side of the story, biases and all. The audience is left to fill in the blanks, and to imagine what the other spouse might be thinking or saying in response. Both Jamie and Cathy are unreliable narrators, and it's not totally clear the first—or the fiftieth—time you listen to or watch *The Last Five Years* exactly what transpires in their marriage. In the play, the subjectivity of each number underpins the sympathy Brown extends to both of his protagonists. It was always Brown's intent "to paint neither as a villain" and for "people to come in with their own baggage and watch the story unfold through that prism."

In adapting for film, LaGravenese made the decision to have the other character present throughout the story. The choice to film Jamie and Cathy together throughout made for considerably more dynamic viewing, but also makes the chronology more difficult to follow for newcomers to the story. LaGravenese has also sacrificed some of the subjectivity that makes the stage musical feel unique. Onscreen, there is no guessing about what Jamie tells Cathy that makes her so angry in the middle of "See I'm Smiling," or about how Cathy reacts to Jamie's impassioned pleading "If I Didn't Believe in You." It's all there, in front of our eyes, with nothing left to the imagination. It's not just Jamie and Cathy's subjectivity that dissolves during the movie, as each one of their claims about the other becomes verifiable; it's the audience's subjectivity, too — our freedom to identify fully with whoever is singing at any given moment. However, the very nature of film allows for a more intimate style of acting and storytelling that musical theater often lacks the ability to deliver, especially in large proscenium-style venues.

This resulted in praise for the film version's ability to give audiences a deeper and more nuanced view into Cathy and Jamie's emotional arcs. Brown himself gave LaGravenese a seal of approval, stating in an interview about the show, "It was healing when I wrote it; now it's just kind of ... luggage; it's always with me. I liked the movie, and I'm still in amazement that it happened at all. I thought Rich LaGravenese did a beautiful job at bringing a cinematic palette to a show that is so insistently and deliberately stage-bound."

The Last Five Years film has immortalized Jamie and Cathy's relationship in a moving and insightful way. LaGravenese hopes that "the movie serves as kind of a litmus test for where you are in relationships." In what's essentially a spoiler-embracing premise—the movie begins, and ends, with heartbreak, only on different sides—LaGravenese's conclusion has a notable amount of poignancy to it and a real sense of sadness. Some stage productions of *The Last Five Years* have managed hopeful notes at the end, with Cathy singing about the excitement of new love, and Jamie, sadder and wiser, bidding her goodbye. This adaptation seems to choose loneliness instead, an ending that's probably more honest, but casts a heavy pall over the film's final moments.

Above all else, film provides a platform to bring the stories, the characters, and the music of Broadway to an expanded audience. While sitting in front of a screen is not the same as sitting before a cast of live performers and instruments, it is a vehicle that has helped musicals transcend modes of entertainment. With literally hundreds of stage-to-screen films made over the decades, these movies present their own challenges, but when done well, can be a masterful blend of two primary art forms.



THE LAST FIVE YEARS FILM POSTER.

Community Connection: Interview with a Marriage Counselor

BY DYLAN GURRERA

Jamie and Cathy's romance builds from their fiery passion yet ultimately fractures into isolation, betrayal, loss, and heartbreak. Even though we witness their passion, we experience it in isolation: only seeing Jamie or Cathy in a place of joy. In this relationship, they both choose to work through—or not work through—major issues in their relationship. Do we see similar problems in our everyday relationships? How do people cope, support, or self-advocate in their romantic lives? *PlayNotes* sat down with EJ Hanks, a marriage counselor in North Carolina, to discuss the relationship dynamics in *The Last Five Years*.



EJ HANKS.

Dylan Gurrera (DG): *Thank you for taking the time to talk today, EJ. I wanted to discuss some of the dynamics in Cathy and Jamie's relationship. One of Jamie's first songs, "Moving Too Fast," speaks to how their relationship gets serious sooner than he imagined. While he is excited, he also expresses his concern about it. In your work, is it common for couples to move too fast in the beginning? Do certain issues arise?*

EJ Hanks (EJH): That's a very good question. There is a biological response to being in love. Our brain floods our body with hormones of intensity, typically at its highest at the beginning of a romantic relationship. Dopamine and oxytocin (both of which are known as the "feel good" hormones) are two powerful hormones that exist at relatively significant levels at this stage. One issue is that while oxytocin is naturally high at the beginning of a relationship, it can decrease over time. Problems can occur as these "feel good" hormones lessen and a lot of couples do not have practical skills to improve the friendship in the relationship to help manage conflict in a positive way.

DG: *In "I'm a Part of That," Cathy discusses her decision to support Jamie's success as a writer, which may come at the expense of pursuing her own career goals. Why might a person in a relationship choose to surrender their own personal goals in order to help their partner reach their goals? Do you have any words of advice for how to maintain a balance between pursuing your own goals and supporting a loved one's goals?*

EJH: It is very important to respect one another's personal and life goals and have a desire to assist one another in reaching them. Resentment can occur if one partner neglects or surrenders his or her own personal development to completely focus on another person's goals. This philosophy can be successful if we are simultaneously nurturing our shared goals to some degree. Creating shared meaning (the idea that both individuals understand each other) through goals is one of the most fulfilling aspects of a relationship. This shared meaning can really strengthen a connection, or bond, between two people. Although balancing the needs of both people may seem difficult, balance does not always mean a fifty-fifty balance. It can be a give-and-take depending on the shared meaning of that specific goal.

DG: *In "I Could Never Rescue You," Jamie places his own notion of what Cathy wanted in their relationship: for someone to rescue her and give her purpose. What happens when we put words or intentions into someone else's mouth?*

EJH: It is very difficult to share your thoughts and emotions when someone else answers for you. The words we choose can often mean the difference between increasing intimate opportunities in relationships or creating emotional distance through miscommunication. No one else can completely understand our position.



WEDDING PHOTO BY LIGHT UP PHOTOGRAPHY.

DG: *On another note, do you see people getting into relationships because they hope their partner will rescue them in some way? What kind of relationship dynamic does that set up?*

EJH: What you are referring to is commonly called a “victim and rescuer” relationship. While this theme often helps the narrative of a great play, these two mindsets can also increase relational toxicity in real life. Victims look for the person that will make them feel better, and the rescuer always feels needed, even essential to his or her partner. Typically, there are no boundaries present and the couple is destined for therapy. The victim gets tired of being the victim. The rescuer gets tired of not being appreciated for rescuing.

DG: *In your last statement, it feels like that’s where communication would be key—that each partner could communicate their needs as they come up. Throughout this entire musical, we see Jamie and Cathy’s lack of communication and how that might affect their relationship. Why might a person be afraid of communicating in their relationship? Do you have any advice on communicating concerns within a relationship?*

EJH: The ability to have intimate and productive conversations is not one we’re born with. How we grew up and how we handle conflict and communication was modeled to us in some fashion. If it was difficult for us to state our true feelings, or talk about a different perception, then that is typically how we manage these issues in our present relationships. We must learn how to intentionally communicate non-defensively and openly. This is a skill-set that can be developed.

DG: *Lastly, I wanted to talk about coping with a relationship’s ending like Cathy does in “Still Hurting.” In this song, Cathy shares how hard it is to watch Jamie move on in his life, while she is still hurting. Do you have any advice for those currently coping with a break-up? How can we healthfully grieve a loss?*

EJH: This is indeed a traumatic event. It’s okay to grieve and feel sad about what happened. Despite who initiated the breakup, you are still experiencing a loss. Research has shown that social support is vital for your healing. This includes reaching out to people for specific responsibilities and remaining connected to the positive people in your life. Most importantly, you should have someone you trust to talk to about your feelings. As the grieving process progresses you will begin to see your way through.

DG: *Thank you, EJ. Is there anything else that you would like to say to our readers that we have not covered in this interview?*

EJH: I appreciated the opportunity to address your readers by answering a few relationship questions. Many of the skills that I mentioned, including communication, problem solving, and tolerating change, are all skills that can be learned. They are necessary contributors to building healthy relationships.



WEDDING PHOTO BY IStock.

And All That Pop: The Golden Age of Musicals

BY PAIGE FARLEY

The Golden Age of musical theater began in the early 1940s and spanned into the 1960s. During this period of time, musicals incorporated strong storylines into song-and-dance performances and reflected perceptions of the “American Dream.” The musical *Oklahoma!* birthed the Golden Age in 1943 by creating a new way of storytelling through a specialized structure in which actors would segue into song when the moment required or when emotion overwhelmed them. Much like musicals today, *Oklahoma!* required the audience to follow the story through songs that were intricately woven together. The Golden Age is generally considered to have begun with *Oklahoma!* and ended in 1968 with *Hair*.



ROYAL NATIONAL THEATRE'S 1998 PRODUCTION OF OKLAHOMA!, PHOTO BY SIMON FARRELL.

1940s

The musical format became popular with productions written by Cole Porter, Irving Berlin, Ira Gershwin and Kurt Weill, and Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II. Rodgers and Hammerstein's musical, *Oklahoma!*, marked the first stage production to integrate themes, character, and plot into a musical score. Popular shows in the 1940s were extremely romantic, funny, and often demonstrated national pride, as many Americans were fighting in World War II and loved to listen to music that reminded them of home. *Oklahoma!* is set in Western Indian Territory after the turn of the 20th century and follows the love story between young settlers.

The music in *Oklahoma!* integrates all of these aspects from Laurey and Curly's duet “People Will Say We're in Love” and embraced national pride in the song “*Oklahoma!*” When the soundtrack was released in 1955 on Capitol Records, the soundtrack quickly became No. 1 on the Billboard Pop Album Chart in 1956 and the first album to become certified gold by the RIAA in 1958. The music in *Oklahoma!* was so admired that the title song became Oklahoma's official state song.

Many other great songs by Rodgers and Hammerstein took hold of popular music, dissolving the line between musicals and popular music of the day. *South Pacific*, which is set on an island during World War II revolves around two parallel love stories that are threatened by the prejudice of war. In 1949, “Some Enchanted Evening,” sung by Ezio Pinza in *South Pacific*, was the most popular song of the year, according to the Lucky Strike Hit Parade. Even more songs from that Rodgers and Hammerstein score became hits on the radio, such as “A Wonderful Guy,” “Bali Ha'i,” and “Younger Than Springtime.” In *South Pacific*, Rodgers and Hammerstein had created a balance between the two by integrating lyrics and rhythms from both musical theater and popular music of the day.



2008 LINCOLN CENTER TOUR OF SOUTH PACIFIC.

1950s

The 1950s was a time of convergence for musical theater, incorporating traditional styles of music – classical, opera, ballet – alongside new styles of music – blues, swing, jazz, rock n' roll.

West Side Story by Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim opened on Broadway in September 1957. *West Side Story* is a modern day Romeo and Juliet adaptation about two rival gangs who fight for control over New York's Upper West Side turf, but things get complicated when one gang member falls in love with a rival's sister. *West Side Story* is considered a realistic piece that is heightened by the inclusion of stylized elements and moments. Bernstein's music in *West Side Story* was strongly influenced by classical, jazz, and popular styles, including music composed by Latinx artists. Though he had a background in classical music, Bernstein felt that jazz at the time was America's music and used it as a source of inspiration for *West Side Story*. You can hear his combination of opera, musical, jazz and Latin-American dance music in his songs "Maria," "Tonight," "Somewhere," and "I Feel Pretty."

Bernstein's music in *West Side Story* personifies diversity and modernism of the mid-20th century American culture. By the early 1960s, it seemed that everyone was enjoying the music from *West Side Story*. The songs "Maria" and "Somewhere" joined numerous singers' collections and jazz combos. Whole albums were even devoted to the soundtrack by artists such as Oscar Peterson and Andre Previn.

Not only did jazz influence the music for *West Side Story*, but the musical also influenced and changed jazz music years after its opening. For a lot of New Yorkers, *West Side Story* became a part of the city and echoed the American idea that the future was somewhere we were all going to. The songs in *West Side Story* interconnected the public and presented a hope that everyone can get along and we can make the future better together rather than apart.



ROUNDAABOUT THEATER COMPANY'S 2009 REVIVAL OF BYE BYE BIRDIE, PHOTO BY JOAN MARCUS.

The musical *Bye Bye Birdie* by Charles Strouse and Johnny Green reflects the late 1950s rock n' roll era. The musical's main character is Conrad Birdie, a beloved famous rock star who has been drafted, is based on the rock singer of the time, Elvis Presley. The musical reflects the emerging rock star character and style of the 1950s in the traditional trope of musical theater. As rock n' roll began to become popular, it entered the musical theatre scene.



2009 BROADWAY REVIVAL OF WEST SIDE STORY, PHOTO BY JOAN MARCUS.



2009 BROADWAY REVIVAL OF HAIR, PHOTO BY JOAN MARCUS.

1960s

The '60s were a decade of monumental change in American history. It was the decade of the civil rights movement, the Kennedy assassination, and the sexual revolution. Music in the '60s was changed by these social influences and gave birth to the diversity in music that we hear today. Many different genres of music emerged in the 1960s, such as surf rock and psychedelic rock, roots rock and hard rock, Motown, R&B, and folk rock and protest music.

Society and pop culture were changing and becoming more diverse, so that only meant that new musicals would reflect current changes. As such, musicals in the 1960s incorporated rock music and focused on drawing the audience's attention to social issues and making voices heard. Controversial topics, such as drugs, racism, and nudity were emphasized in plots and productions.

The 1967 musical *Hair*, lyrics by Gerome Ragni and James Rado and music by Galt MacDermot, captures the life of a politically active "tribe" of long haired hippies who fight against the rules of society and dodge drafts, but the tribe is thrown into disarray when one of their members is drafted. Songs from the rock score, such as "Aquarius," "Good Morning, Starshine," and "Let the Sunshine In," became hits on the radio, adding to the popularity of the show.

The New Golden Age

Jumping forward to the 2000s, musicals of our time have been inspired by pop culture and have starred many pop singers of our day. Incorporating modern pop music into musicals is allowing musicals like *Hamilton* and *Dear Evan Hanson* to hit Billboard's Top 20 chart.

In turn, many popular albums have been crafted into musicals such as Green Day's *American Idiot*, Alanis Morissette's *Jagged Little Pill*, and Anais Mitchell's *Hadestwn*. Today's musicals have also brought new life to old stories. *Hamilton* is a great example of how history can be told through the incorporation of modern music such as hip-hop, R&B, pop soul, and some traditional-sounding showtunes.

Could a new Golden Age be on the rise? Musical have become more and more popular over the years and have fit into popular culture, though many musicals are adaptations of material that has previously achieved commercial success. The musical *Waitress* is adapted from 2007 film of the same name with music and lyrics written by the singer Sara Bareilles and was also released as an album. It follows the story of a pregnant waitress in the south trapped in an abusive marriage and looking for a better life. *Waitress* is just the tip of the iceberg, scores of classic films such as *King Kong*, *Mean Girls*, and *Pretty Woman*. currently exist as adaptations on Broadway. *Be More Chill* by Joe Iconis is based on the novel of the same name by Ned Vizzini, which is about a pill made from a new technology that can help losers become popular. It invokes characteristics found in musicals like *Little Shop of Horrors* and *Damn Yankees*. Iconis says, "Good writing is rooted in classic musical theater—it's just what feels correct and what makes sense." As time progresses and pop culture changes, we still find inspiration and comfort in familiar stories. Although musical theater is its own genre, over the decades it has found a way to balance its classic stylized music and sound with the ever-changing style and ideas of pop culture.



SINGER AND COMPOSER, SARA BAREILLES, STARRING IN WAITRESS ON BROADWAY. PHOTO BY JEREMY DANIEL.

Live at the Scene (Shop)

Portland Stage is fortunate to have our own scenic shop right here in the building (our costume shop is upstairs too). Every show you see on our stage has been built just for us on-site with our wonderful Technical Director, Ted Gallant; Carpenter, Emily Dixon, and Scenic & Carpentry Intern Kelsey Book. You'll also spot our Props Master (And Scenic Designer for *The Last Five Years*), Meg Anderson; as well as her Props Assistant Emily Kenny working hard to bring this show to life! So, when you sit back and take in the show, take a second to appreciate the beautiful scenery, made just for you!



EMILY KENNY, MEG ANDERSON, KELSEY BOOK, AND EMILY DIXON HARD AT WORK IN THE SCENE SHOP.



TECHNICAL DIRECTOR, TED GALLANT, INSTALLING THE SET.



THE ARCHWAY, THAT SERVES AS THE CENTERPIECE FOR SCENIC DESIGNER MEG ANDERSON'S SET.

Recommended Resources

BY THE EDITORS

Non-Fiction

Anything Goes: A History of American Musical Theatre by Ethan Moridden

Everything is Illuminated by Jonathan Safran Foer

The Ghost Writer by Philip Roth

The History of Love by Nicole Krauss

The New American Judaism: The Way Forward on Challenging Issues From Intermarriage to Jewish Identity by Rabbi Arthur Blecher

Plays

Constellations by Nick Payne

Betrayal by Harold Pinter

Merrily We Roll Along by Stephen Sondheim

Love Letters by A. R. Gurney

Lungs by Duncan Macmillan

Works by Jason Robert Brown

Honeymoon in Vegas

Parade

Songs from a New World

The Bridges of Madison County

Urban Cowboy

13

TV/Film

About Time

One Day

The Last Five Years



PRODUCTION OF CONSTELLATIONS AT MANHATTAN THEATER CLUB, PHOTO BY JOAN MARCUS.

Portland Stage Company

Education and Outreach

Join Portland Stage as we discuss, debate, and explore the plays on our stage and in the classroom! Portland Stage is dedicated to bringing exciting theater, inspiring conversation, interactive experiences, and thought-provoking literature to a wide audience of youth and adult learners. Whether you take part in a discussion, subscribe to PlayNotes, take a class in our Theater for Kids space, or bring a group of students to see a performance, there is something here for everyone. How would you like to participate?

Student Matinee Series

The Portland Stage Student Matinee Program annually provides more than 7,000 middle and high school students from Maine and New Hampshire with discounted tickets for student matinees. Following Student Matinee performances, students participate in discussions with members of the cast and crew, actively and energetically exploring all elements of the production and the issues raised in the play.

Play Me a Story

Experience the Fun & Magic of Theater on Saturday Mornings at 10:30am with Play Me a Story! Ages 4-10 are welcome to enjoy a performance of children's stories, then participate in an acting workshop with professional theater artists. Build literacy, encourage creativity and spark dramatic dreams! Walk-ins are welcome, but pre-registration is encouraged!

After School Classes

After school classes at Portland Stage produce a safe environment for young people to find a higher sense of play, stretch their imaginations, and gain valuable social skills such as listening, risk taking, ensemble building, public speaking, and leadership through storytelling. These classes are wildly fun, creative, spontaneous, and begin to build skills for the young actor or non-actor's voice, body, and imagination. Visit our website for this year's offerings!

Vacation and Summer Camps

Our theater camps are fun, challenging and enriching. We use stories of all kinds to fuel these active, educational and lively, process-based week-long school vacation and summer programs for youth. Theater for Kids works with professional actors, directors, artisans and composers. Students are invited to think, speak, and act, and even sing imaginatively, critically, and creatively in an environment of inclusivity and safe play.

Classroom Workshop Program

The Classroom Workshop Program partners Portland Stage with regional middle and high schools to enhance the experience of students who participate in the Early Show Program by complementing their visits with pre- and post-show workshops in their own classrooms. Workshops are led by professional Teaching Artists who engage students in the creative process through writing, acting, directing and discussion.

The Intern Company

The Portland Stage Intern Program is committed to training future generations of theater professionals. Applicants should be highly motivated individuals who have acquired basic training in the theater arts and are looking to explore their field further through meaningful hands-on experience. Portland Stage interns can expect to be challenged by a creative process that relies on both ingenuity and collaboration. Interns at Portland Stage work with leading designers, directors, administrators, and our professional production team throughout the season. They leave with a greater knowledge of the theatrical process and the satisfaction of being part of a dedicated theater company where exceptional quality is the end goal.

Portland Stage Company 2018 - 2019 Staff

Anita Stewart *Executive & Artistic Director*

Artistic & Production Staff

Meg Anderson *Props Master*
Todd Brian Backus *Literary Manager*
Daniel Brodhead *Asst Production Manager, Lighting & Sound Supervisor*
Hannah Cordes *Education Director*
Emily M. Dixon *Scenic Carpenter*
Megan Doane *General Manager & Production Manager*
Ted Gallant *Technical Director*
Myles C. Hatch *Stage Manager & Group Sales Manager*
Julianne Shea *Education Administrator*
Susan Thomas *Costume Shop Manager*
Shane Van Vliet *Stage Manager*

Affiliate Artists

Ron Botting	Daniel Noel
Peter Brown	Michael Rafkin
Daniel Burson	Ed Reichert
Maureen Butler	Hans Indigo Spencer
Ian Carlsen	Dustin Tucker
Moira Driscoll	Bess Welden
Abigail Killeen	Monica Wood
Callie Kimball	Sally Wood

Administrative Staff

Paul Ainsworth *Business Manager*
Chris DeFilipp *House Manager*
Julia Fitzgerald *Development Assistant*
Beth Given *Development Director*
Lauren Kennedy *Social Media & Marketing Asst*
Alex Kimmel *Company Manager*
Martin Lodish *Finance Director*
Reneé Myhaver *Assistant Box Office Manager*
Eileen Phelan *Director of Communications,
Marketing, and Engagement*
Donald Smith *Audience Services Manager*
Nathan Sylvester *Front of House Associate*
Adam Thibodeau *House Manager*
Shannon Wade *Box Office*

Intern Company

Kelsey Book *Scenic & Carpentry*
Stephanie Collins *Stage Management*
Paige Farley *Education*
Dylan Gurrera *Directing & Dramaturgy*
Carlee Ihde *Costumes*
Emily Lawrence *Education*
Terysa Malootian *Stage Management*
Meaghan Parker *General Administration*
Rebecca Rovezzi *Directing & Dramaturgy*
Vianey Salazar *Electrics*
Eileen Thoma *Costumes*
Jae-Yeon Yoo *Directing & Dramaturgy*