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**Miranda Lundskaer-Nielsen**

### **Musical Theatre Writer training in Britain: Contexts, Developments and Opportunities**

One of the legacies of the global explosion of commercial West End hits in the 1980s and 90s has been a marked increase in musical theatre activity outside the US in the form of shows, producers, venues and audiences. While Broadway and the West End are still regarded by many as the global epicentres of musical theatre, the past few decades have seen the growth of new international markets for musical theatre in countries like Denmark, Germany, Holland, Japan, Spain and more recently in China, with the accompanying emergence of major local producers such as TOHO and Shiki Theatre Company in Japan, Stage Entertainment in Holland and Vereinigte Bühnen Wien in Vienna—many spurred on by the new approaches to international licensing by Cameron Mackintosh in the 1980s. This surge in interest has been accompanied by a noticeable rise of performer training courses outside the US in the form of vocational diplomas or the expanding range of degrees that can be found in conservatoires, universities and Further Education Colleges.

However, while performer training has proliferated, there is a relative lack of the kind of systematic, formal training opportunities for musical theatre writers available in the US. While clearly embarking on a very uncertain career path, the aspiring American musical theatre writer is working within a country that has a powerful sense of the musical as a respected national art form, even as it has evolved and broadened with the emergence of the Off Broadway, chamber and non-profit musicals over the past few decades. Specifically, American writers benefit from four key types of support and guidance. Firstly, they have access to a body of literature that analyses and celebrates the American Musical both in cultural terms and in terms of dramaturgical craft. Secondly, they can draw on an established tradition of mentorship within the musical theatre industry. Thirdly, there are a range of training programmes in the US from the two-year full time Graduate Program in Musical Theatre Writing at Tisch School of the Arts at New York University to industry-based programmes like the BMI Workshop (a two-year workshop programme) and the ASCAP workshops for aspiring writers. Finally, writers in the US have access to a wide range of professional development and performance opportunities such as workshops, public readings and writing commissions at leading producing theatres like the Public Theatre, Playwrights Horizons and Manhattan Theatre Club in New York; La Jolla Playhouse in San Diego; and the Goodman Theatre in Chicago.

These substantial opportunities for training and development are largely absent outside the US, even in countries that have seen a great surge in musical theatre activity. Willem Metz, Executive Producer with Stage Entertainment, confirms that in Hollands, while there are now musical theatre performer training courses—and also formal writer training in other genre such as screenwriting—musical theatre writer training is largely confined to one-off workshops and masterclasses for invited

participants, such as the half day masterclass on composing led by Alan Menken in conjunction with a production of *Sister Act*. (Metz, 2013) Similarly, TOHO producer Mariko Kojima notes that despite the large musical theatre industry in Japan there is no formal musical theatre writer training programme. (Kojima, 2013) As a result, producers are too often reliant on imported shows or derivative work. And when new musicals are commissioned, it is quite common for American writers to be brought in. *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, one of the biggest new West End musicals in recent years, is a case in point: despite being based on a British children's book that is set in Britain, the producers hired Broadway composer-lyricist Marc Shaiman to write the score. Clearly, there is a place for international collaboration and talented writers will quite rightly be in demand internationally across the global marketplace. But there is a fundamental problem if American writers are repeatedly hired over local talent because of a (perceived) lack of artists with the necessary talent, craft and experience to be entrusted with new musicals. In order to address this situation, countries outside the US need to work harder at training and nurturing writers who can combine the craft and historical awareness of their American counterparts with a more culturally specific approach in order to create musicals that can become an organic part of national theatre cultures.

### **Musical Theatre Writing in Britain**

In Britain, there has been a gradual shift towards addressing this issue over the past decade or so. A crucial moment within this was the Arts Council of England's new approach to musical theatre from 2010, moving from an assumption that this is an inherently commercial art form to recognition of the need to invest in the development of new talent and new work within this genre.<sup>1</sup> This support now takes different forms, including institutional funding for theatres that undertake new musical theatre development; support for individual projects through the Grants for the Arts programme; and in 2012 a substantial three year grant awarded jointly to writers' organisation Mercury Musical Developments and production company Perfect Pitch to develop a national infrastructure for developing new work (Marcus, Saward and Underwood, 2010:5).

In addition, the Arts Council commissioned the writers' organisation Mercury Musical Developments to compile a report on the development needs of musical theatre writers in England. In this report, completed in February 2010, the authors offered an analysis of current opportunities, detailed case studies of individual writers, a survey of current members and identification of the shortcomings in the current infrastructure for supporting writers and new writing. (Marcus, Saward and Underwood, 2010) Above all, it voiced a feeling of pride and aspiration regarding British musical theatre:

as indicated in the activity discussed in this document, particularly in the last ten years, there is a refusal to accept that "the Americans do it best", and there is within our reach a musical theatre (or rather a diverse range of musical theatres) that combines popular appeal, speaks with a British voice and has the courage to tackle subjects of relevance to contemporary culture; one that engages the emotions and the intellect for both broad and targeted audiences (Marcus, Saward and Underwood, 2010:5)

In the following pages, I will examine the training and development opportunities in Britain as a case study for approaches to nurturing musical theatre writers outside the US. The discussion will focus on four key areas of writer development: analysis of the available literature from the perspective of a non-US writer; the role of industry mentors and sponsorship; industry-based professional development; and formal Higher Education courses. Sources include the Writers Survey that I conducted in April-May 2013 as part of this research, which includes anonymous responses from 61 members of Mercury Musical Developments, the UK based musical theatre writers organisation. In the survey, respondents were invited to comment on what kinds of training they had received in musical theatre writing; whether they had made use of books on musical theatre as part of their professional development and if so, which ones they had found particularly useful and why; which aspects of their training they had found particularly helpful and why; whether they feel that there are training opportunities that are missing from the current range on offer, and if so what kind of training and education would be of value to emerging and / or established writers; whether they think that formal Higher Education courses in musical theatre writing (e.g. one or two year Masters course) might be of value to emerging writers and, if yes, what skills training / knowledge / learning it should include; and finally whether they had any further thoughts on the current training opportunities for musical theatre writers in the UK or ideas for what they would like to see offered.

### **Musical Theatre Literature in Context**

Given the lack of formal training opportunities and the high proportion of writers who are largely self-taught, books on musical theatre genre and on the craft of writing are a crucial way for individuals to connect with others in their field, access practical advice on craft and professional processes, and learn from experienced practitioners. Many of the respondents in the Writers Survey (Lundskaer-Nielsen, 2013) highlighted the value of books on related topics like music theory, screenwriting and rhyming dictionaries as important reference points for their work. Alongside these, they cited specific works on writing musicals as influential on their development as writers. The literature within the field that is commonly available include classic analyses of the musical such as Lehman Engel's *Words with Music: Creating the Broadway Musical Libretto* (1972)<sup>ii</sup>; Aaron Frankel's *Writing the Broadway Musical* (1977)<sup>iii</sup> which started to analyse and classify the Broadway musicals of the 1950s and 60s; and later Stephen Citron's *The Musical from the Inside Out* (1997)<sup>iv</sup>. More pragmatic books aimed directly at writers include Richard Andrews' *Writing a Musical* (1997)<sup>v</sup>, David Spencer's *The Musical Theatre Writer's Survival Guide* (2005)<sup>vi</sup>, Allen Cohen, A. and Steven L. Rosenhaus' *Writing Musical Theatre* (2006)<sup>vii</sup>, and Julian Woolford's *How Musicals Work and how to write your own* (2012)<sup>viii</sup>. Between them, these works offer an impressive level of detailed dramaturgical advice, in-depth case studies, writing exercises, historical context and practical information about working as a writer in the musical theatre industry.

However, one major issue for the non-American reader is that the scholarship in this field—of which the above texts constitute a good portion—generally present a historiography that excludes or marginalises the rich and varied developments in musical theatre outside the United States. One way this is done is through the unspoken but implicit conflation of 'musical theatre' and 'American musical theatre', as if the two terms were synonymous rather than one being a subset of the other. In the case of Frankel and Engels, the title makes their cultural standpoint clear with the

term ‘Broadway musical’ in the title. But the other titles offer no acknowledgement of cultural viewpoint, and there is often an implied claim to be writing universal truths to a universal audience that belies the author’s specifically American approach, reference points and intended readership. (The two British authors, Andrews and Woolford, are the exceptions to this rule: Andrews’ book is mainly concerned with the British musical theatre scene and Woolford’s book generally offers a balance of British and American examples to illustrate his points.) For while the Golden Age Broadway musical certainly dominated musical theatre internationally in the mid-C20th, there are long and successful traditions of musical theatre in various forms in other countries. However, it is notable that references to non-American musicals (which usually means European) tend to be restricted to two periods: the pre-C20th ballad operas and operettas and the Mackintosh / Lloyd Webber shows in the 1980s and 90s. Even then, the way in which these are dealt with indicates a deep reluctance to acknowledge musical theatre as anything other than an American art form.

This cultural stance may be attributed in part to the fact that musical theatre is so widely seen as reflection of—and commentary on—wider American culture and society, as explored in both Raymond Knapp’s *The American Musical and the Formation of National Identity* (2004) and in John Bush Jones’s *Our Musicals, Ourselves* (2004). This sense of national pride in, connection with and sense of ownership of the musical has clearly been a positive engine for the development of the art form in America. However, when adopted by historians and professional mentors in print it can result in a somewhat selective and even dismissive view of musical theatre from outside the United States.

Lehman Engels’ seminal 1972 book *Words with Music* is a case in point. The book makes many references to European opera, music and drama but these are framed to limit their relationship to the American Musical: specifically, he prefaces his discussion of *The Beggar’s Opera* with the comment that ‘I find it interesting to note that *although it influenced nothing that was eventually accomplished here in America* [my italics], there existed here in full bloom nearly two and a half centuries ago a great musical comedy, and the model for all librettos existed even more than a century earlier’ (Engels, 2006:225). In a similar vein, Stephen Citron opens his book with the statement that ‘[u]ntil the dawn of the Seventies, whenever anyone mentioned the word “musical” one assumed they meant the American musical....Nobody did it better; in fact, works that had their origins in Britain or France were usually laughed off the stages of Broadway’ (Citron, 1997:13). The generalisation here is clear: while using terms that suggest universal application (‘anyone’, ‘one’) Citron is clearly talking specifically about the perception of non-American musicals in America.

While many of the books listed acknowledgement of the hit West End shows in the 1980s and 90s, they are almost invariably included only because of their penetration of the American market, divorced from any discussion of the cultural context that these came out of, and with a palpable tension around how to incorporate them into the America-centric historiography. On the one hand, there is a desire to be associated with the success of those shows and it is not uncommon to hear *Les Miserables* or *Phantom of the Opera* referred to as Broadway musicals despite the fact that they originated in the West End. On the other hand, they are regularly dismissed by critics and scholars as aberrations and sometimes even labelled as a different genre than the American Musical. In his otherwise rigorous book, Frankel notes:

The British musicals all differed generically, in fact, from American musicals. Curiously, all were hybrids of some sort. *Cats* was a song and dance revue, but tied together with the barest of books. The others are all mixed-bag throwbacks of the overwrought melodrama of opera and the fantasy romance of operetta...with music to match (Frankel, 2000:xii).

This argument seems a little strained because, as any history of the genre will attest, the American musical is nothing if not a hybrid of forms, which accounts for the great stylistic differences between shows like *Porgy and Bess*, *Candide*, *West Side Story*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Pacific Overtures*, *42<sup>nd</sup> Street*, *Songs for a New World* and *Contact*. There is certainly a different tone to many of the West End musicals of this era than to many traditional Golden Age Broadway shows, but rather than side-lining these shows as a different genre, it might be useful for writers to understand the particular cultural influences in these shows, which are not restricted to old fashioned opera and operetta but also include British epic social drama and influences from contemporary pop and rock music. These attempts to create a distance between West End and Broadway musical also tend to ignore the involvement of Broadway veterans in many of the hit West End shows, including director Harold Prince (*Evita*, *Phantom of the Opera*), choreographer Bob Avian (*Miss Saigon*) and lyricist Richard Maltby Jr (*Miss Saigon*). In addition, it ignores the fact that many of the key players in the West End musicals –including composer Andrew Lloyd-Webber and producer Cameron Mackintosh - had a strong awareness of and admiration for the traditions of the Broadway musical and have cited them as influences.

In *The Musical Theatre Writer's Survival Guide* (2005), David Spencer—an American writer and a teacher at the BMI workshop in New York—is even more overt in his compartmentalising of the West End hits on Broadway. The book contains valuable practical advice on the craft and business of writing musicals set out in a pragmatic, accessible and engaging style. But while the title is addressed to all writers the contents very clearly assume that the reader is American. This is particularly evident in his discussion of the ‘Euro-musical’: having established the caveat ‘I have no wish to cubbyhole all European-bred musicals out of hand-for there are some interesting ones out there that America has never encountered’ he goes on to state his intention ‘to categorize what we’ve come to know and expect as Euro-musical trademarks, with the term “Euro-musical” used to define the idiosyncratic school of writing that promulgates them’ (Spencer, 2005:55-56). The term ‘we’ clearly presumes that the reader is American, and while he acknowledges the existence of interesting musicals “out there” he does not offer the reader any examples of what they might be or why they are interesting. Central to his discussion is the characterisation of these ‘Euro –musicals’ as distinct from the American Musical: they are ‘push-button entertainment machines’ that are ‘a separate animal – borne of a distinctly non-American, even opera-house sensibility, utilizing a different vocabulary, employing few fresh or untried writing voices, and all generated by producing entities with enough money and power to support the excess’ (Spencer, 2005:55). Spencer offers many astute observations in his book, but this particular argument rests on the misleading premise that American musicals do not draw on other art forms like opera, do not employ established writers, and are not backed by producers with big production budgets. At the end of this section, he goes on to exhort his readers to see the shows but only so they can understand the wider musical landscape and not as potential templates:

Enjoy them (if you can), admire them (if you do), take from them whatever inspiration seems useful and motivating (the energy and showmanship can be exhilarating)...but do not follow in their footsteps. The widely known Euro-musical template is a deceptive anomaly. Like any other siren song, hers will only lead you astray...(Spencer, 2005:56)

It is, of course, perfectly legitimate and indeed valuable for American scholars and practitioners to write works that are geared towards American composers and librettists wishing to write in the traditions of American musical theatre. However, there is an issue of underlying bias for an international readership when there is no acknowledgement of this cultural standpoint, when non-American works are treated dismissively and when there are no complementary works for writers offering different cultural reference points. As it stands, aspiring non-American writers are faced with a literature that is not only overwhelmingly US-centric in its historiography, reference points and implicit intended readership but also dismissive and/or ignorant of developments in musical theatre elsewhere. It seems clear that as musical theatre continues to develop around the world there is a need for a more comprehensive literature that contextualises the art form more internationally—and for those who are writing specifically about the American Musical to acknowledge this both to themselves and to their readers.

### **Industry Mentors and Sponsorship**

While books are an accessible and valuable source of information and stimulation, they obviously cannot replicate the benefits of one-to-one or team-led professional guidance. Mentorship has played a crucial role in nurturing many acclaimed musical theatre practitioners: most of Broadway's Golden Age artists learned their craft through a form of mentoring or apprenticeship to more experienced artists, with directors like Harold Prince, Jerome Robbins, Bob Fosse and Michael Bennett and starting out as stage managers, dancers, assistant directors/ choreographers to established directors before directing their own show. It is of course harder to find work as an assistant composer, lyricist or bookwriter but the importance of industry mentorship and apprenticeships is as important in this field. Tellingly, the key findings of the 2010 Arts Council report included the importance of having an industry mentor, noting that 'all successful writers have relied on significant investment/risk by a "sponsor", regardless of their starting point and prior writing training.' (Marcus, Saward and Underwood, 2010:5) The report further highlights that many established writers had forged useful contacts through working in a different role within the industry (Marcus, Saward and Underwood, 2010:36) but this route is clearly of limited use, for while working in a producer's office may help aspiring writers to understand how the industry works, it won't give them the chance to hone their skills at writing lyrics for specific characters, plotting a show or experimenting with different approaches to musical dramaturgy.

What writers need above all are financial and creative opportunities to write, receive constructive feedback and get their writing performed—such as when a theatre or producer offer writers a developmental workshop of a new piece with dramaturgical support from the artistic director of the theatre. While these opportunities are increasing, and are welcomed by writers, this type of mentorship sometimes come at a high price in terms of artistic control. At the 2013 UK symposium on 'The Business of Writing Musicals' in London<sup>ix</sup>, composers and librettists expressed concern and

frustration around the question of authorship when working with directors, dramaturgs and producers on the development of a new show. While writers in television and film do not have copyright over their material, theatre writers traditionally do; however, writers noted that theatres who offer such opportunities often retain a share of the royalties or production rights for all future productions. In addition, there was an issue of creative control and authorship when a producing theatre that provides dramaturgical support in the developmental stages then expects a dramaturgical voice in the future shaping of the project and subsequent productions. One practical suggestion was that writers have a protection clause which stated that if the show was not produced after a certain time the rights would revert to the author.<sup>x</sup>

### **Industry-based Professional Development**

While the current conditions are far from ideal, and the pathways for writers far from clear, there has been a recent growth in different industry training initiatives that have enabled UK based writers to develop their skills and understanding of both their craft and of the industry. Many of these mirror—at least partially—established US organisations like the National Alliance of Musical Theatre, the New York Festival of Musical Theatre, professional writing courses and workshops run by the BMI Workshop and by ASCAP. Mercury Musical Developments (MMD) was founded in 1999 from a merger between the Mercury Workshop and the New Musicals Alliance. It is a UK based support organisation for musical theatre writers and includes developmental opportunities such as one-off craft masterclasses and industry seminars as well as helping to set up and administer more substantial opportunities like industry showcases of selected works and residencies. The focus here is largely on helping people who are already writing and active in the field. Perfect Pitch was established in 2005 as a development and producing company for new musicals that works largely through partnerships with other producers, including both producing and receiving venues, and in this respect serves an important role in opening up outlets for musical theatre writers in venues that have not traditionally done this kind of work. It offers dramaturgical advice to writers as part of the development of their work as well as facilitating a platform for their work, whether as a workshop, a recording or a full production. Book, Music, Lyrics was set up in 2010 by American writer and designer David James. This course is closely modelled on the BMI Lehman Engels Musical Theatre Workshop in New York. Subject to an application process, composers, bookwriters and lyricists can attend a three-year part-time programme of study. In the first year they deconstruct existing shows as well as completing assignments to write different kinds of songs for existing British plays (e.g. ballad, charm song, comedy, musical scenes) with a final assignment to write a 10 minute musical. In the second year they work on one adaptation project with a collaborator and write a series of songs. In the third year, they develop their own work. The key here is regular feedback from experienced musical theatre practitioners and the chance to think in detail about structure and craft of existing material as a springboard to creating new work.

In addition to these organisations and programmes dedicated to nurturing new musical theatre, one of the most important developments in recent years has been the gradual but growing inclusion of new musical theatre into subsidised and regional theatres in Britain alongside other new work, providing a broad range of venues, artistic missions and economic frameworks within which to create work that ranges in scale and covers a broad spectrum of musical and theatrical styles.



Theatre Royal Stratford East is a prominent example of how musical theatre can form an exciting and coherent part of a theatre's wider artistic mission. Since 1999, the theatre has run a developmental summer programme that specifically aims to bring together writers from other areas of music and theatre than traditional musical theatre (although tellingly the programme is taught by two graduates of the Tisch MFA programme in New York). The workshop mirrors the theatre's general focus on serving the multicultural community of East London where the theatre is situated and it therefore forms an integral part of the theatre's artistic mission. Their shows include *The Big Life* (2004)—a ska musical composed by reggae musician Paul Joseph about West Indian immigrants in the UK in the 1950s; the Jamaican-set reggae musical *The Harder They Come* (2013); and *The Infidel* (2014), a comedy based on the film of the same name in which a Muslim East End man discovers he has Jewish roots.

Other key incubators of new writing include the West Yorkshire Playhouse, with shows such as *Spend, Spend, Spend* (1998) based on the true story of a woman who won and lost a fortune, and features a specifically Yorkshire background and cultural references (the show subsequently transferred to the West End). Equally, the international success of the controversial *Jerry Springer-The Musical* began in 2000 at the Battersea Arts Centre in London, whose low-risk, experimental environment allowed the writers to develop a show that has a very different tone and content than most commercial musicals at the time – the show was subsequently developed further and produced at the National Theatre in 2003, while the show's lyricist Richard Thomas went on to co-write the idiosyncratically British musical *Made in Dagenham* (2014) based on the film of the same name. Meanwhile, the National Theatre's programme of introducing pairs of writers in a low-key, experimental workshop programme resulted in the creation of *London Road* (2011), an intrinsically British piece of music theatre that used verbatim theatre and music that replicated and played with speech patterns, while the theatre's premiere of *The Light Princess* (2013) brought together singer-songwriter Tori Amos, playwright Samuel Adamson and director Marianne Elliott to create a highly distinctive musical theatre experience.

All these industry initiatives have been greatly boosted by the recent reversal of the Arts Council's approach to musical theatre: one specific outcome of the Arts Council funding to Perfect Pitch was the 2013 launch of the Perfect Pitch Award in association with the Royal & Derngate theatre in Northampton offering a prize for a new musical of £12,000 plus dramaturgical support from this leading regional theatre. Crucially, all these programmes and initiatives are increasing the opportunities for informal mentorship and networking alongside the formal programmes and events by bringing together writers and producers with a common interest in creating new musical theatre.

### **Higher Education Courses**

Alongside these industry developments, Higher Education Institutions in Britain have started to assume a more active role within the ecosystem. The one-year MA Musical Theatre at Goldsmiths College, University of London, offers an academic and practical course geared towards writers and producers while the Central School of Speech and Drama offers training opportunities to music theatre composers. Summer 2015 will see the launch of a short intensive course at the Guildford School of Acting taught by Julian Woolford and David Spencer. And in September 2015, a new MA Musical Theatre will launch at Mountview co-taught by Tisch alumna Jenifer Toksvig

and echoing that programme's focus on collaboration and experimentation, with a first cohort of four writers and four composers.

In time, it would be interesting to see more Higher Education courses with different areas of specialisation within the broad genre of musical theatre. Some of the suggestions offered in the 2013 Writers Survey include both full length degrees and short courses that focus variously on collaboration between composers, lyricists and bookwriters; on the relationship between composer and the Musical Director; on understanding the needs of the performer; on the business side of creating and producing work; on understanding new technologies for composition and distribution of new work; on the specific crafts of composing for the stage and of writing lyrics and book for musical theatre; repertoire studies; and courses that offer access to working practitioners as mentors and opportunities to try out work in front of an audience (Lundskaer-Nielsen, 2013).

However, one possible obstacle to such courses is that there is still quite a widely held perception that formal teaching of craft and the repertoire is not a prerequisite for a career as a musical theatre writer. The 2010 Arts Council report found that 'formal musical theatre writer training is valuable, but cannot be shown to be an essential ingredient in the careers of all successful writers' (Marcus, Saward and Underwood, 2010:37) and this position was confirmed by many respondents in the 2013 Writers Survey. In particular, there is quite widespread scepticism within the industry about the idea of teaching musical theatre writing within the framework of an academic course. Producer Nick Allott argues that talent is not something that can be taught and that talented writers are much better served by contact with an experienced mentor (Allott, 2013) while only 30% of respondents in the 2013 Writers Survey agreed with the statement that 'a formal Higher Education course in musical theatre writing (e.g. Masters course) would be of value to emerging writers'. One rationale for this was a fear of lack of quality control at entry and false expectations: 'Don't ever encourage people to believe that taking a degree course or signing up for a training programme will guarantee them anything. Training someone with a dream but no talent will just make [them] good at being bad.' (Lundskaer-Nielsen, 2013) Another concern was a perceived disconnect between the focus on individual expression in Higher Education courses and the practical demands of the musical theatre industry: 'In my dealings with students who have gone through the sausage factory the big things which soon becomes evident is that they are taught how to write the "art musical"... Stephen Sondheim is fetishised ad infinitum, and the fact that musicals exist mainly in the commercial realm seems conveniently to be forgotten.' (Lundskaer-Nielsen, 2013)

Of course, this kind of opposition –by no means universal, but endemic within the industry –is not restricted to musical theatre and has often been levied at other creative writing courses. And yet – partly as a result of the Arts Council's focus on supporting new plays in the 1980s – there are Creative Writing and Playwriting courses on offer at universities across the UK. While it is quite true that many successful shows were created by writers without an MA in Musical Theatre, there is surely a benefit to giving aspiring writers a solid understanding of the genre that they are working in, of the dramaturgical tools available to them, of how other writers have approached and changed the art form, and the opportunity to experiment in a supported environment. The benefit of such courses would seem particularly important in terms of developing the art form. The industry is generally looking for a

vocational feeder course for the current landscape and measures success by the ability of course graduates to clock up high profile professional credits. However, universities have a broader remit and what often differentiates them from more pragmatic, industry-based courses are their traditions of intellectual questioning, of challenging the status quo, of encouraging people to shape their own distinctive voices, and providing a safe place in which to try out new ideas – and possibly to ‘fail’ – within a supportive environment. Higher Education Institutions are therefore a natural home for creative practitioners who wish to step back, reflect, experiment, be challenged, find their voice and possibly start to envision new approaches to the art form as well as learning the practicalities of working in the industry as it is today.

This argument is supported strongly by Julian Woolford, a musical theatre writer, director and lecturer who is a strong proponent of a range of formal training opportunities for MT writers to suit the needs of different individuals (Woolford, 2013). He points out that those who question the value of a musical theatre writing course are often using quite a narrow definition of success and argues that evaluating a writing course according to the commercial (West End) hits of the graduates is a bit like evaluating a science Masters degree according to whether all the graduates achieve the Nobel Prize. He notes the broader reasons why people wish to learn this craft - from commercial aspirations to those who wish to hone their skills in order to write for their church youth groups—and argues for a similar approach to the one taken in actor training courses, i.e. that while you cannot teach someone talent, if we train people and give them craft someone will create something good (Woolford, 2013).

In developing these courses, then, there are a few practical challenges to be met. One is the innate resistance from aspiring and existing practitioners to the idea that writing musicals is to some extent a craft to be studied and learned. Another challenge is to ensure that these courses respond to the cultural context(s) of the institutions and their students: while an understanding of the canon is valuable, we must ensure that the canon we are studying and celebrating includes musical theatre in its many forms and cultural contexts. In addition, these courses between them need to provide awareness of—and useful pathways into—the wide range of international musical theatre activity, from commercial musicals of varying sizes to shows suitable for regional theatres, more experimental music theatre, community theatre, young people and children’s theatre and culturally specific theatre traditions such as the British pantomime. This will of course entail a close awareness of and dialogue with industry practitioners, but it will also be important to avoid Higher Education Institutions becoming so aligned with current industry needs and markers of success that they abandon the broader educational goals that are their great strength. Because while—alongside industry opportunities and literature—they can offer valuable practical skills training, they also have an important role to play in challenging and shaping the cultural debates around musical theatre, and in doing so highlighting the many different possibilities of the art form for the next generation of writers.

In Britain, the past decade has seen a gradual acknowledgement of musical theatre as a national art form, with an evolving dialogue between the commercial and subsidised sectors; the Arts Council and the musical theatre industry; scholars and practitioners; Higher Education Institutions and industry organisations; and between the growing network of producers and producing theatres. The coming years have the potential to

be an exciting time for the art form, and crucial to this will be a much greater investment in training and development for writers in a bid to establish musical theatre as an intrinsic, exciting and authentic part of the British theatre scene.

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<sup>i</sup> For further analysis of these developments please see Lundskaer-Nielsen, M. (2013a) "The Long Road to Recognition: New Musical Theatre development in Britain." *Studies in Musical Theatre* 7(2) pp. 157-173. Intellect

<sup>ii</sup> Engel, L (2006) *Words with Music: Creating the Broadway Musical Libretto*. New York: Applause

<sup>iii</sup> Frankel, A. (2000) *Writing the Broadway Musical*. Da Capo Press

<sup>iv</sup> Citron, S. (1997) *The Musical from the Inside Out*. Chicago, ILL: Ivan R. Dee

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<sup>v</sup> Andrews, R. (1997) *Writing a Musical*. London: Robert Hale

<sup>vi</sup> Spencer, D. (2005) *The Musical Theatre Writer's Survival Guide*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann

<sup>vii</sup> Cohen, A. and Rosenhaus, S. (2006) *Writing Musical Theatre*. New York; Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

<sup>viii</sup> Woolford, J. (2012) *How Musicals Work and how to write your own*. London: Nick Hern

<sup>ix</sup> 'The Business of Writing Musicals', The Free Word Centre, London, 18 April 2013.

<sup>x</sup> Ibid.