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From pencil to performance: the creative nexus of arranging, orchestration and music direction in works of contemporary pop/rock musical theatre

Schimmel, Brian

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ABSTRACT

In the art form of musical theatre, available literature on the creative musical aspects of musicals has focused primarily on the composers and/or lyricists; their works having been extensively analysed and documented. There is, however, comparatively less literature and documentation on the processes that guide the transformation of the theatre composer's work to an eventual performance embracing arranging, orchestration and music direction. This dissertation explores these practices from two perspectives – the creative and the recreative.

First, from the creative perspective, I challenge Joseph P. Swain who makes a compelling case for composition as a tool of dramaturgy in his book *The Broadway Musical: A Critical and Musical Survey* (2002). I contest that his argument cannot hold true for pop/rock musicals in which the scores are comprised of pre-existing popular music that was not originally or intentionally composed for the stage. In order to understand how music functions as a dramatic element in musical theatre, it must follow that all collaborative creative forces that contribute to this music must be evaluated in a holistic manner. Dramaturgy contextualises and elucidates storytelling and artistic vision. While Swain has postulated that composition is an element of dramaturgy, I offer the notion that since arranging and orchestration contextualise and elucidate the composition they therefore cannot be excluded as dramaturgical devices. I support my thesis with analyses of select examples from the scores of the Broadway musicals *Jersey Boys* and *American Idiot*, as well as introducing and analysing my own arrangement and orchestration of *Streets of Gold*, an original South African pop/rock musical. Second, from the recreative perspective, I offer insights and perspectives into music direction in musical theatre; a multi-layered practice that is often misunderstood and underestimated and consequently remains largely under-documented.

In my Conclusion I connect the two perspectives and reflect on the nexus of practices that lies between the composer's pencil and the eventual performance of a work of pop/rock musical theatre.