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Title of the extended essay: Which techniques of Bob Fosse influenced and led to the revitalization of Broadway musicals of the 1970's?

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was a driven and determined candidate who exuded a deep and abiding interest about her chosen topic. Together we ~~worked~~ tracked down productions (both live and recorded) that could be used to inform and strengthen her RE approach. She added to this a commitment to analysis and detail that speak well to her strengths as a student of theater. This ~~is~~ was authenticated in Termination.

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Assessment form (for examiner use only)

Criteria	Achievement level					
	Examiner 1	maximum	Examiner 2	maximum	Examiner 3	
A research question	2	2		2		
B introduction	2	2		2		
C investigation	2	4		4		
D knowledge and understanding	2	4		4		
E reasoned argument	3	4		4		
F analysis and evaluation	2	4		4		
G use of subject language	2	4		4		
H conclusion	1	2		2		
I formal presentation	2	4		4		
J abstract	1	2		2		
K holistic judgment	2	4		4		
Total out of 36	21					

Which techniques of Bob Fosse influenced
and led to the revitalization of Broadway
musicals of the 1970's?

Subject: Theatre
Advisor:
International Baccalaureate Extended Essay
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Abstract

In this extended essay I researched the question of which techniques of famous choreographer Bob Fosse influenced the Broadway musicals of the 1970's. Through his effective techniques of innovative choreography and story-telling, Fosse revolutionized the American Broadway industry. I specifically analyzed the popular musicals *Chicago*, *Sweet Charity*, and *Pippin* to support this thesis. In order to investigate my topic, I watched stage productions of these three musicals. I also went to a live production of *Chicago* at a local theatre, Players by the Sea. It was beneficial to see these productions because I could analyze the choreography first-hand. And I could see how it worked alongside with the story-telling. However, these productions were not Fosse's originals, but they only showed how influential his techniques had become. I also began researching information about the Broadway industry in the 1970's. I discovered articles about lost elements of choreography, as well as reviews on Fosse's work. I watched *All That Jazz*, which was a semi-autobiographical movie directed by Fosse that portrayed his chaotic and stressful lifestyle. It helped to get an overall idea of how the business transformed his life. After all of my research, I was able to conclude that there is strong evidence that Fosse's work transformed the musical industry. He successfully showed his audiences that there was so much more to this era than just fame and fortune. He brought out the importance of dance as a musical element and accompanied it with innovative storytelling. Thanks to Bob Fosse, we can study how one man's knowledge of passion for theatre revolutionized American Broadway through a career that lasted over four decades.

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Introduction

The question that this theatre essay asks is “which techniques of Bob Fosse influenced Broadway musicals of the 1970s?” Fosse was a Broadway choreographer and dancer that revitalized the styles of modern Broadway dancing. The focus of many Broadway musicals in the 1970s welcomed a common theme of “fame and fortune,” which is exemplified well in the musicals I will be focusing on. To be successful, these musicals had to connect to the audience and keep them entertained. In my opinion, dance is an extremely important factor in the success of a musical. The singing and acting contribute immensely, but the dancing is what ties them both together and pulls up the quality of the entertainment. So in response to my question I examine how Bob Fosse was a famous Broadway choreographer who had a large impact on Broadway musicals of the 1970’s. I mainly discover that his creative techniques of choreography and innovative story-telling led to a revitalization of the American musical. I will look to the popular Broadway musicals of *Chicago*, *Pippin*, and *Sweet Charity* in order to see how each of these factors strengthened and renewed the musical experience. The answers to this question can easily be supported by the fact that Fosse created a new age of musicals that is still very well-known and reproduced in the society of Broadway. One of Fosse’s most famous pieces, *Chicago* is still produced often and I in fact just saw it in November of 2011. Fosse’s production of *Chicago* also inspired the production of a movie based on the musical. His overall styles were combined to create *Fosse*, a musical revue that showcased and honored his dancing career. His lifestyle also inspired the production of a movie titled *All That Jazz*, which is a semi-autobiographical film based on Fosse’s own extravagant lifestyle. My topic is significant because it shows

the importance of dance in Broadway, and how a man revolutionized the musical theatre of the 1970's through his career that spanned over four decades.

Choreography

One of Fosse's most important contributions that led to the revitalization of the American musical was his innovative techniques and styles of choreography. Initially, i will be conducting an in-depth analysis of Fosse's choreographical techniques in *Chicago*, *Pippin*, and *Sweet Charity* in order to determine his influence on Broadway musicals of the 1970's.



Chicago

Chicago is a very well-known Broadway production that originally opened June 3, 1975 at 46th Street Theatre in New York City. Bob Fosse was the original choreographer of this first production, which makes *Chicago* a beneficial musical to analyze for this research paper. Fosse was continually surrounded by dance and theatre, and also grew up in Cabaret nightclubs. Many of his movements were taken from these burlesque halls; so naturally, his signature style became sexually

¹ <http://www.streetswing.com/histmain/posters/gif/p-fosse1.jpg>

suggestive. He was imbued with the provocative gestures of strippers. Three of his trademarked moves included rolled shoulders, turned-in knees, and sideways shuffling.

2 His jazz style and moves revolutionized the world of dance and provided entertainment for the given audiences. His greatest accomplishment, that he does often not receive credit for, is his ability to incorporate these movements and dances into his theatrical creations. This is what makes Fosse such a good director as well as choreographer, because he combines dance with all other aspects of the musical to create a completely conceptualized Broadway show.³ During the 1997 Tony awards, Bebe Neuwirth and an ensemble of dancers performed “All That Jazz,” which is the first musical number from *Chicago*. From what I saw in the video, the ensemble centers on Velma Kelly, the star of the jail, and she sings the number. The dancers exhibit a lot of head rolls, hip rolls, and jazz fingers. When she sings the first “all that jazz,” the entire ensemble does shoulder rolls and snaps their fingers. This adds to the suspense of the music because the choreography coincides with the beats of the song. I think that the way the ensemble dances around Velma shows her feelings of dominance in the beginning of the musical. Another important number is “Cell Block Tango,” in which each of the girls at the jail shares their story about why they got arrested. The choreography is much fiercer, and it reflects the harsh, rebellious attitudes of the performers. When I saw the production in November, the stage was set up with individual cell walls, and they used them as props while they were dancing, adding to the reality of the scene. The influence of burlesque hall dancing is definitely seen in these key dances of the musical.

Sweet Charity

Sweet Charity centers around a dance hall hostess named Charity, who experiences ups and downs in her romantic life before eventually quitting her job to marry a man that leaves her. The musical focuses on the life of a dancer, and since she worked in a burlesque dance hall, many of the moves that inspired Fosse are implemented into the choreography of this musical. One of the well-known musical numbers from this production is "Big Spender". Fosse inserts some wild moves in which the dancers flail around, but they make it look good. Rather than performing as many separate dancers, they really dance the number as a whole group. This makes the performance look much more cohesive, and it makes the choreography better, as long as everyone is together on the same count. When they move across the stage in a clumped formation, they extend their arms, and some are plied to provide levels within the group. Charity's big number in this piece is titled "If They Could See Me Now," in which she reflects on her charmed life that she spends with Vittorio. This choreography in this number reflects Charity's jubilant mood, and the moves could almost be described as a "happy dance." She prances around the room and therefore depends a lot on her surroundings, using the props as support for her moves. The song "There's Gotta Be Something Better Than This," is a rooftop performance of three of the dancers expressing their desire to be somewhere else, with a different life. It shows all of the common Fosse characteristics; the small movements, the dancing as a group, and they also use their costume skirts as a prop to exemplify their movements. Critics have described Charity's character as lovable, comical, and a "time capsule of late 60's New York City."² It has also been mentioned that Fosse's direction is innovative and daring. The moves that he assigns to Charity make her character the "sweet and lovable"

² <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0065054/reviews>

person that the audience views her as. Many of the numbers, such as “If They Could See Me Now” and “There’s Gotta Be Something Better Than This” portray Charity as a hopeful individual that’s looking for better things and experiences in her life. The bouncy, upbeat choreography that Fosse provides for these musical numbers really contributes to the enjoyment of the show by the audience. Slower numbers, such as “Big Spender”, are more sensual and the movements reflect more of the Burlesque-style dancing. Fosse really implements the mood into the choreography, which is what sets him aside as one of the greatest Broadway choreographers of his time.

Pippin

Pippin takes a different route than Fosse’s usual storylines that surround Burlesque dancers. The basic plot of *Pippin* centers around the son of King Charlemagne, who sets out to find the meaning of life. Along this journey he also finds his true self. In opposition to *Chicago* and *Sweet Charity*, the numbers of this musical focus more on the prince and his philosophical findings, rather than the demise of a showgirl in jail, or a dance hall girl that is searching for love. *Pippin* is often underrated among Broadway critics, but it is often said that if the show was produced particularly the way that Fosse had envisioned it, *Pippin* would have been a musical of surreal and disturbing substance. Channeling a Brechtian style of theatre, this show breaks the fourth wall, with the leading player and his troupe speak directly to the audience. The opening number, “Magic To Do, is performed by the leading player and his troupe, in which they invite the audience to join them in a story where a young prince embarks on a journey searching for fulfillment. This number begins with the Leading Player singing solo and inviting the audience to “Join us: come and waste an hour or two!” The

choreography is unique because the troupe is initially all hidden except for their hands, which is where the only movements are made. These movements coincide with the notes and rhythm of the song. When a note is drawn out, the hands usually glide across the screen. In the number, "Glory," Pippin is about to go to war with his father, King Charles, and stepbrother, Lewis. At this point, the Lead Player and his troupe return to the stage and perform a number that glorifies warfare and violence. The choreography depicts a mock battle, while using top hats, canes, and a fancy jazz style. This imitation of war upsets Pippin, causing him to flee to the countryside and run away from the war with the Visigoths. A short trio in the middle of this dance, performed by the Leading Player and his two lead dancers, became famously known as the "Mansard Trio". The choreography in the number includes a lot of movement in the hips, and uses many props to help tell the story of the war. It is also important to the story because it results in Pippin's negative feelings toward war and therefore his fleeing to the country. After Pippin murders his father, he realizes his mistake and asks the Leading Player to bring him back to life, which he does. The Leading Player proceeds to inspire him "On the Right Track". At this point in the play, Pippin is feeling low and doesn't know where to turn. This number is all about Pippin trying to follow in the Leading Player's footsteps. The choreography consists of a lot of jazz squares and intricate footsteps. The two characters move across the stage a lot, and you can see within the dancing that the Leading Player is slowly, successfully raising Pippin's spirits. This number also depicts Pippin's experimentation with art and religion, when he realizes that "you have to be dead to find out if you're any good" and the church is "not saving souls, it's investing in real estate!" The number concludes with Pippin collapsing to the ground and the

Leading Player dropping to a split before popping back up to point at Pippin. "On the Right Track" provides a temporary feeling of relief and inspiration for Pippin. In all, the choreography of Bob Fosse has had an immense effect on Broadway musicals of the 1970's, and his work has clearly gone on to inspire many productions today. As we can see in *Chicago* and *Sweet Charity*, Fosse implements many elements from his observations and lifestyle surrounding dance halls in order to inspire his choreography. *Pippin* takes a different turn as it tells a different story, and has more of a sophisticated jazz feel to it.

Nonetheless, Fosse's unique choreography, not only in these musicals but in many more, led to the revitalization of the American musical. Fortunately, choreography was not Fosse's only contribution to this. As this essay continues, I will be discussing the intricate ways in which Fosse's direction tells a story.

Storytelling

Another One of Fosse's vital contributions to the revitalization of the American musical was his innovative methods of story-telling. Many professionals in the business of Broadway know that story-telling can be the most important element of the show. As I was researching for this paper, I stumbled upon an article about Rick Lewis, a musical director at Portland Center Stage. Holly Johnson had conducted an interview with him, in which she asked his opinion on what elements make a musical shine successfully. In his response, he starts by saying, "I think my job in working on a musical is, and it might sound strange, is to put the *logic* into it. I think storytelling is the biggest aspect, even if it's a 14-voice ensemble. Because there is a journey you're taking the audience on,

whether the audience wants to admit that or not.”³ Lewis makes a good point here; many musicals are made in order to deliver a theme or important symbol to the audience. The other elements I discuss in this paper (choreography and staging) are definitely important elements. Musical would not be successful without them, because it’s the flashing lights, carefully choreographed dances numbers, exciting vocal pieces and intricate special effects that draw the public and make them interested in seeing shows. But the element that ties together all of the aesthetic characteristics is story-telling. Without it, the audience wouldn’t have a story to follow. Lewis also says that “It’s always interesting to me when I start working on a show: I know what the story is, but I don’t know until I start working with people how the story is going to be told. That’s what’s really fun, because we do it together.” So through other directors work, we can see that putting all of the pieces of a musical together is ultimately really tough work. But as the elements come together, the audience is usually left with an entertaining show that sells well to the audience. Again in *Chicago*, *Pippin*, and *Sweet Charity*, I will now be analyzing the stories to determine how Fosse influenced Broadway musicals of the 1970’s.

Chicago

Chicago an innovative story that is set in the Prohibition era in Chicago. Fosse directed this satire on corruption in the criminal justice administration, touching on the concept of the “celebrity criminal”. Growing up around dance halls and vaudeville performers, Fosse was the ideal director for this show. This allowed for him to put his personal experiences into the musical, which can create a better connection with the

³ <http://oregonmusicnews.com/2010/06/26/good-storytelling-sakes-good-musicals-rick-lewis-and-he-should-know/>

audience, because they can see that Fosse actually knows what he's doing with this production. As I mentioned earlier, Fosse's choreography prospers due to this benefit as well. *Chicago's* important theme that Fosse is trying to get across demeans the system of justice and how special attention is given to the "famous criminals". Roxie Hart was at the age of 23 when she was accused of killing her nightclub lover, Fred. She gets thrown into Cook County Jail with Velma Kelly, a vaudevillian who murdered both her husband as well as her sister upon finding them in bed together. Mama runs the jail, and she is working with Velma to publicize her arrest, and organizing her big return to vaudeville when she is proved innocent. At the dismay of Velma, Roxie slowly steals the limelight when she comes to the Cook County Jail. She also takes her lawyer, Billy Flynn, who takes Roxie's case and rearranges it to appeal to the reporters. This is the part in the story where the audience starts to see that *Chicago* is a commentary of the deception in social justice in order to please a society that eats up stories about innocent criminals that are desperate to get back into reality and pursue their careers, making crime seem somewhat attractive. Roxie is shortly forgotten by the media when an even more scandalous criminal takes her place. Through a false claim of pregnancy, Roxie holds on to her fame for as long as possible. But as soon as her trial is over, the celebrity lifestyle goes with it. Billy is done with the case and Roxie is left alone when her husband discovers that she isn't really pregnant. In the end, Roxie and Velma team up in a new act. In an extensive analysis of *Chicago*, critic Scott Miller mentions that "This was the third time Fosse would use the false glamour of show business – the lie at its core – as a metaphor for life. He did it first with the film of *Cabaret* (1971), then with *Pippin* (1972), and he'd return to this idea pushing it to its furthest extreme with the

autobiographical film *All That Jazz* (1980). He attacked hypocrisy wherever he saw it, even in his own work. He knew the world of Chicago, in which killers are made into stars, isn't far at all from the real world."⁴ In the research I conducted, I watched the movie *All That Jazz*, which was a film directed by Fosse that reflected on his own life style and the stressful effects of working in show business. Miller is correct when he says that Fosse attacks hypocrisy even within his own work. Throughout the movie, Fosse's alter ego, Joe Gideon, is shown repeatedly taking drugs, smoking cigarettes, and he even has a heart attack due to over-stress.

Sweet Charity

Sweet Charity is another Broadway musical directed by Fosse that surrounds the world of vaudeville entertainment. Charity Valentine is a taxi dancer at the Fandango Dance Hall in New York City. While *Chicago* was made to comment on the injustice of the "celebrity criminal," *Sweet Charity* focuses more on the ups and downs of her own romantic life. At the beginning of the play, her boyfriend Charlie takes her handbag and pushes her into a lake in Central Park. One of Charity's fellow dancers tells her the reason for her romantic dismay. Nickie tells her: "you run your heart like a hotel — you've always got people checking in and checking out." Vittorio Vidal, a film star, finds Charity on the streets after one of her shifts and drags her inside the Pompeii Club. After a fainting spell, she is whisked away to his apartment. There she asks him for a signature or some sort of evidence to show her friends that she was really in his home. While he looks for some proof of her being there, his mistress returns and Charity is thrown into a closet while Vidal and Ursula spend the night together. Charity is embarrassingly shown out of the apartment the next morning. Eventually she meets a

⁴ <http://www.newlinetheatre.com/chicagochapter.html>

charming man named Oscar in a broken down elevator. Through this experience, he asks her on a date and she eagerly agrees. They continue dating, although Charity tells him she works at a bank. She feels as though she is becoming more reliant on Oscar, and this scares her. Also, she quits her job out of frustration with a new co-worker. When she can no longer take it, Charity tells Oscar her real profession, and he says he does not care and wants to marry her. Elated, she accepts his proposal, only to be rejected and dismissed by Oscar at a farewell party. He shoves her into the lake and Charity repeats her opening number. In "Intermediality and Storytelling" by Marina Grishakova and Marie-Laure Ryan, the authors comment on this musical, saying "it is obvious that the stylized choreography thematizes the relationship between man and woman, which is a central theme in the musical." I agree with the theme that Grishakova and Ryan present here because Charity experiences many different romantic encounters throughout the show. That's what the entire musical is about, showing the trials and tribulations of Charity's unsuccessfulness with love and men. In the end, she ends up still in a somewhat positive light, something I commend her for because most women would be emotionally distraught. This musical shows the independence of women and their ability to function in society without a man. Ultimately, Charity was better off without Charlie or Vidal or Oscar; working in the dancehall without any distractions is what seemed to work best for her.

Pippin

The storytelling in *Pippin* is very different from *Chicago* or *Sweet Charity*. This particular show of Fosse's veers away from the centralization around vaudeville. The writing in this show is about a young prince who embarks on a journey to find the

meaning of life, and he finds his true self along the way. In a philosophical sense, this show has a much more evident display of its themes. Like I mentioned before, this musical is written in the style of Brecht, so the characters are engaged with the audience. In *Pippin*, a Leading Player and his troupe invites the audience to join them in a story about Pippin, the son of King Charlemagne, who is searching for fulfillment. Pippin tells them of his dreams and is happily applauded for his ambition. Then he returns back to the castle where he lives, running into his father, stepmother Frastrada, and stepbrother Lewis. The two sons and the king plan enter battle. The troupe reemerges here and does the number that glorifies warfare. An upset Pippin runs away to the country and experiences several sexual relationships, which he finds unfulfilling. He returns home to plan a revolution, and kills his father, taking the throne. Realizing the negativity of this decision, he asks the Leading Player to revive his father and he does. In a way this is like Macbeth, because Duncan is killed and Macbeth takes the throne. The Leading Player inspires Pippin and attempts to see him on the right track in life, because the troupe is one that Pippin looks up to. He meets a woman and falls in love with her (Catherine). Eventually, he comes to the realization that the only place he was truly happy was with her and her son. He feels satisfied because he had made an attempt at every possible path of fulfillment. The Leading Player and his troupe pack up and leave, frustrated that Pippin had left this extraordinary purpose for a life of simple ordinance. *Pippin* gives its audience a fun show that has many important underlying themes. It shows Pippin's extensive emotions, and I think it may be trying to portray that we don't all need to live life extraordinarily. Sometimes the little things in life can come together can make one perfectly happy for an entire lifetime. One thing that Pippin really

came to realize is the importance of love. I think that through Catherine, he saw changes in himself that brought him to a sense of completion. With her presence and joy, he was a much happier man. In a way, this theme contradicts that of *Sweet Charity*.

The story-telling aspect of the modern Broadway musical is just as important as the choreography. Fosse directed shows in a way to make their themes evident, because by doing so, it only makes the other elements of a musical that much more powerful. His exquisite work to make the two come together in a way that flowed perfectly is what allowed him to revitalize the world of Broadway.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is evident that Fosse's creative style of choreography and his innovative story-telling strongly influenced Broadway shows of the 1970's, leading to the revitalization of the modern American musical. Fosse's techniques of implementing a detailed story line and theme into his unique dancing is what really grabbed the attention of the audience. The shows in the 1970's were all about "fame and fortune", and Fosse grasped this and showed an audience that fame can be accompanied with so much more. He was able to strongly renew the musical experience and leave the world of Broadway with so much to work with. He significantly showed the importance of dance, and through Bob Fosse, we can study how one man used his knowledge of dance and story-telling to revolutionize musical theatre in the 1970's through a career that spanned over four decades.

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