

**G403 PERFORMANCE CONTEXTS 2: EXEMPLAR WORK FOR CANDIDATE A**

**G403 Question: In what ways does the American Musical represent both celebration and criticism of American society?**

(June 2010)

5. The American musical has been develloping for around a hundred years. Throughout this time it has seen many key events in time that have changed the social structure of America, such as wars and depression. The American musical has played a huge part in society, representing it in both a positive and negative way.

Before musicals were written, the antecedants existed. The main antecedants were Vaudeville, European Operetta, Minstrell shows, Burlesque and Follies. Minstrell shows criticised American society as they were seen to be extremely racist. This is because the shows consisted of white people ‘blacking up their faces’ and imitating black people. However, you could say that they also celebrated American society as they included the ethnic minority. Bert Williams was a popular star of Minstrell Shows. Another antecedant that represented American society were sexy Burlesque shows. These were intended for an adult audience whereas vaudeville was more for the family. They were extremely scandalous. In 1907 Florenz Ziegfeld (impresario extraordinaire) took inspiration from the French ‘Folie Bejére’ along with his own ideas to create the popular Ziegfeld follies. These follies celebrated American society in that they epitimised the idea of The American Dream (a better life). The girls within the follies wore lavish costumes and were perfectly proportioned as Ziegfeld tried to “glorify the American Woman” so that women all around America wanted to be like these girls. Similarly, Ziegfeld was not afraid to use other races in his shows and soon hired Bert Williams. The white actors threatened to quit as they did not want to work with him and Ziegfeld’s response was “Go ahead. I can replace every one of you except the man you want me to fire.” This shows how Ziegfeld celebrated American society by including other ethnics. Ziegfeld had a very positive view on American society, which is obvious through his work in World War 1. In 1917, Ziegfeld wrote plays to unite America and rally the troops. In 1904, ex-vaudeville star George M Cohan left his vaudeville act to create ‘Little Johnny Jones’. Through numbers such as ‘Yankee Doodle Boy’ he was able to create an extremely patriotic piece of theatre that celebrated American society. In addition to this, the show opened 12 days after the opening of The Times Square Subway which was a huge social event for America at the time.

However, after a decade of celebrating American society, the 1920s brought huge social and cultural change to America. In 1921, American society was hugely criticised thank to the

*Sp?*  
*Basic Intro but indicates direction of answer to the Q.*

*Odd expression and Sp?*

*evidence?*

*Better idea*

*K but Point?*

*Gm? Evidence?*

*K but point?*

*Sp?*

*Sp?*  
*Q.*

*K but what did they perform?*  
*How?*  
*K & Q used in advertising but what did they do?*  
*K & U*

*K*  
*Context*  
*Q*  
*Slang*

*Evidence?*

*K, Q & Context*

*Eg*  
*‘Patriotic’ could have provided a theme for this Q rather than just the conventional chronological approach.*  
*Context.*

*Huge & hugely! Sp?*

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<p>show 'Shuffle Along' with Eubie Blake. It was the first show to have an all-black cast and a conditional love song. Furthermore, it was the first time that black people could sit in the audience alongside the white people. Although the show greatly celebrated African culture, it criticised American society for the previous exclusion of this culture.</p> <p>This idea continued throughout the 20s and especially in 1927 with a musical that was said to be "unequaled in the history of American theatre"; Oscar Hammerstein II's Showboat. It was the first book musical, with music by Jerome Kern and was <u>absolutely massive</u> in that it brought strong themes such as immigration and miscegenation (marrying someone from a different ethnic background) that had never been seen before. It deeply criticised American society through numbers such as 'Ol' Man River', where black people sang about how hard it was to be in America, "I'm tired of living but scared of dying." Similarly, it criticised American society by celebrating other ethnic backgrounds. For example, in the song 'Can't help lovin dat man of mine', half-black Julie Laverne sings in an afro-American style, representing her background. The show was that critical and powerful that the audience didn't applause it on opening night, instead they just sat stunned with silence at what they had seen. Showboat truly helped to create social change in America.</p> <p>In 1929, the Wall Street Crash <u>occured</u> and America fell into The Depression; it was a socially bad time for everyone. However, all hope was not lost as composers such as George Gershwin and Richard Rodgers tried to celebrate American society by writing songs <u>to cure the depression</u> such as 'Brother can you spare a dime?' Irving Berlin used a similar technique in 1941 when America entered World War II. Berlin created a show called 'This is The Army' in an aid to boost morale and see the war as positive. To do this, the actors within the show were all soldiers from the army. These tactics from Berlin, Gershwin and Rodgers were used to bring positivity back into America and celebrate society.</p> <p>Richard Rodgers then went on to collaborate with Oscar Hammerstein II to create Oklahoma! in 1943. This musical had come a long way from Showboat as it "went against the grain" of expectation and elevated dance to equal status as drama and music. The musical celebrated American society as it gave a homely, idealistic view of American life and supported The American Dream. In fact, the opening number was a big risk for Hammerstein as it wasn't huge. It captured the idea of The American Dream perfectly with simply a woman churning butter. Similarly, the end <u>epitimized</u> the American Dream as the 2 main characters, Curly and Laurie, fall in love in a true fairytale way. Oklahoma had a huge positive effect on society as it opened during World War II. Free tickets were given to the soldiers in order to boost morale.</p> <p>Rodgers and Hammerstein took a different approach to</p>	<p><i>Context but evidence of 'criticism'</i> <i>K but explain and give eg.</i></p> <p><i>K context</i></p> <p><i>Needs more to justify the point.</i></p> <p><i>Showboat</i> <i>K</i></p> <p><i>Excessive expression</i></p> <p><i>K&amp;U, Q, Context</i></p> <p><i>Eg but some comment on the use of music would deepen the point at this level.</i></p> <p><i>Eg</i> <i>Explain in musical terms</i> <i>K but not just 'background'-</i> <i>Has implications for the plot</i></p> <p><i>Context</i> <i>Analyse don't advertise-</i> <i>generally</i> <i>Sp</i></p> <p><i>R &amp; Hart – eg?- Conn Yank/</i> <i>Present Arms?</i> <i>Expression?</i> <i>Eg but Gorney &amp; Harburg</i> <i>Context</i></p> <p><i>Eg</i> <i>How? Music, dance drama?</i> <i>K</i></p> <p><i>Problem with a chronological approach is that big gaps of K and U- 1930s- become obvious.</i></p> <p><i>K</i></p> <p><i>K &amp; Q</i></p> <p><i>K but is it a live musical or a painting? What happens as well as the churning?</i> <i>Sp?</i> <i>More to it than just this.</i> <i>Some ref to character</i> <i>K of context</i> <i>More potential in Oklahoma!</i> <i>for this Q- eg the triumph of</i></p>
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<p>representing society in another collaboration, <i>The King and I</i>. This time, instead of celebrating society they criticised it by showing a clash of cultures. The musical showed the <u>arragant</u> King of Siam hiring English Anna to take care of his many children. The musical however was very biased towards Western Civilisation which is shown through a discussion between Anna and <u>The King</u> about the role of women. Similarly, <u>The King's</u> slave-girl Tuptim performs a number based on the American book 'Small House of Uncle Thomas' which portrays a slave trying to escape. The dream-like choreography criticises slavery and almost celebrates American Society for the abolishment of it. Thanks to Jerome Robbins, the choreography appears like a dream due to his ballet style, influenced by Agnes de Mille's 'dream sequence' in <i>Oklahoma</i>.</p> <p>This idea of clashing culture was furthered in 1957 as Leonard Bernstein along with Stephen Sondheim and Jerome Robbins created <i>West Side Story</i>. It was described as a modern-day <i>Romeo and Juliet</i>. However, the Capulets and Montagues were replaced by the New York Jets and the Puerto Rican Sharks. Bernstein brought sophistication to the musical as he tried to portray the clashing of culture through his music. For example, in the number 'Dance at the Gym' he cleverly combines American blues and promenades, reminiscent of the 20s and 30s America, with Latin American cha-cha and mambo to portray the culture of both the sharks and jets. This Latin-American style is also shown through the song "America" which Bernstein created in the style of 'huapango'. This is a <u>mexican</u> dance style where the pulse changes from a 6/8 beat to a 3/4 beat (see example 1 on manuscript paper). Bernstein tries to criticise American society here as three characters die due to the feuding cultures. This shows how American society fails to accept other cultures.</p> <p>Stephen Sondheim got his big break from <i>West Side Story</i> and then went onto create 'Company' in 1970. This musical hugely criticised American society. It premiered at the end of the 'swinging 60s' where the sexual revolution meant that divorce was more common. <i>Company</i> successfully criticises divorce and marriage, highlighting the boredom and trivialities that come with it. This is shown through the number 'The Little Things You Do Together' which projects the lyrics "It's not so hard to be married, I've done it 3 or 4 times." Here you can see how marriage is being mocked in that society has changed and the value of marriage has been lost. All of Sondheim's songs in <i>Company</i> were "inserted like nuts into a fruit cake" to merely comment on the action and give different views of marriage. However, the overall message of the piece is that it is better to be married than alone.</p> <p>American society is both celebrated and criticised in the 1975 musical <i>Chicago</i>. The musical was originally based on a play by Maureen Dallas Watkins. She then left the play in her will to</p>	<p><i>good over evil through Am. Dream</i></p> <p>Q. Sp?</p> <p>K &amp; U <i>Explain 'dream-like choreog.'</i></p> <p><i>This is a well-discussed para, using K well, but would have benefited from some detailed eg to evidence the Am. 'influence' in K&amp;I</i></p> <p>eg</p> <p>eg</p> <p><i>K and U with music detail</i></p> <p><i>Number also useful for Q?</i></p> <p><i>? change of tone from Oklahoma!</i></p> <p><i>Style?</i></p> <p><i>K&amp;U &amp; context</i></p> <p><i>Eg lyric, but also music reflection of change in tone in society?</i></p> <p><i>K but relevance and further evidence – songs into action?</i></p> <p><i>How is the overall message achieved?</i></p>
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<p>choreographer Bob Fosse who created the musical Chicago along with John Kander and Fred Ebb for his third wife Gwen Verdon. She then got the main role of 'Roxie Hart' in the musical. Chicago celebrated American society in that it captured the essence of the 1920s jazz age with the prohibition and numerous speak-easies. The 20s were a socially great time for America. However, Chicago also criticises American society due to the mocking of the American judicial system. It mocks the rise of the 'celebrity criminal' as it focuses on women who were famous for killing their lovers. Fosse's choreography captures the 20s <u>antecedants</u> perfectly through vaudeville numbers such as 'All that Jazz' and ventriloquist acts such as 'The Press Conference Rag'. Similarly, John Kander's music has also been successful in capturing the essence of the 1920s. The punchy, jazzy tunes found in songs such as 'Hot Honey Rag' and 'Cell Block Tango' are reminiscent of the music that would have been listened to in the Broadway <u>speak-easys</u> (illegal drinking dens) of the 1920s.</p>	<p><i>K but relevance to Q?</i></p> <p><i>K &amp; Q</i></p> <p><i>Evidence in show?</i></p> <p><i>Q</i> <i>K but eg?</i></p> <p><i>Eg art form – music and/or dance – detail?</i></p> <p><i>K &amp; Eg</i> <i>Explain and use Music detail?</i> <i>Sp?</i></p>
<p>Bob Fosse's other successful shows include Cabaret (1972) and Sweet Charity (1966). Both of these musicals have a different way of representing American society. In Sweet Charity, ^ main character Charity Hope Valentine is in search of the perfect love. Dorothy Field's lyrics 'There's gotta be Something Better Than This' <u>epitimises</u> the American Dream perfectly as Charity wants to get out of her dance-hall hostess life and find the man of her dreams. As well as choreographing, Fosse has directed the musical which has a more uplifting feel to it than some of his other work. For example, Cabaret criticises American society. It almost has an opposite effect to what Ziegfeld tried to achieve in 1907 with his follies. He 'glorified the American Woman' whereas Fosse makes his girls ugly. He de-glamourises them through his choreography. For example, the use of bent knees, awkward angles and dead-pan faces. These became signature moves of Bob Fosse and were all derived from his first successful number. In 1954, George Abbot created 'The <u>Pajama</u> Game'. Fosse's first successful number was found within this show in 'Steam Heat'. This number is the foundation for the signature moves found in his later shows. Fosse criticises society as he was a very hard man. He worked hard and played hard, smoking, drinking and having numerous affairs. In a biography of his work <u>it is told how</u> "he was not just mean to others, he was mean to himself". His cynical attitude shows why he liked to criticise American society and why it is widely shown through his work.</p>	<p><i>Q</i> <i>Eg</i></p> <p><i>K</i> <i>Eg</i> <i>Sp?</i> <i>K, but use evidence from song, music choreography to demonstrate how she aspires to more.</i></p> <p><i>Q</i> <i>Compares neatly Ziegfeld-Fosse attitudes to Am. Women.</i></p> <p><i>K</i> <i>K&amp;U</i></p> <p><i>Eg</i></p> <p><i>Repeats</i></p> <p><i>K</i></p> <p><i>Expression?</i></p> <p><i>K but more needed to evidence point.</i></p>
<p>In conclusion, from the <u>antecedants</u> through to later work such as Chicago, American society has been constantly changing and the American musical has changed along with it. The 20<sup>th</sup> Century American Musical has continuously commented on</p>	<p><i>Sp?</i></p>

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<p>society, whether its critical in Company or celebratory like in Oklahoma. American society has played a huge part in writing musicals and has evidently made it what it is today.</p>	<p><i>Conclusion.</i></p>						
<p><b>Marks for Candidate A:</b></p> <table data-bbox="145 394 667 499"> <tr> <td>Knowledge &amp; Understanding</td> <td>30</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Quality of Language</td> <td>7</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Total (out of 45)</b></td> <td><b>37</b></td> </tr> </table> <p>This would have been a Grade A in June 2010</p> <ul data-bbox="197 607 1444 1283" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>1917 words- about what is expected for an answer to this paper.</i></li> <li>• <i>Comprehensive with a good sense of breadth across the area, although the repetition of 'antecedents' as though they are a genre in themselves is overdone. The insistence on including that material with little comment in relation to the question makes for a slow start.</i></li> <li>• <i>A chronological approach leads to obvious gaps in K&amp;U and not necessary here- a theme approach of for example patriotism, and treatment of race issues would have worked equally well. Despite the approach, the answer is constructed to create a readable flow, which only gives way towards the end.</i></li> <li>• <i>More art form detail and examples would have achieved more, but there is a sense of overview, which indicates a convincing understanding of the musical in the context of the question.</i></li> <li>• <i>Rushed towards the end with remarks on Fosse that are more biography than evidence of his 'criticism'.</i></li> <li>• <i>A small number of spelling errors and unnecessary excessive expression -e.g. huge &amp; hugely- limits the Quality of Language mark</i></li> </ul>		Knowledge & Understanding	30	Quality of Language	7	<b>Total (out of 45)</b>	<b>37</b>
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