

IP327-15 Do you hear the people sing? Revolution and the modern musical

24/25

Department

Liberal Arts

Level

Undergraduate Level 3

Module leader

William Rupp

Credit value

15

Module duration

10 weeks

Assessment

100% coursework

Study location

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

As an art form, the musical is a global phenomenon. London theatres alone grossed over £800 million in box office sales in 2022, with a significant percentage of that derived from stage musicals. Developing out of traditions such as opera buffa and vaudeville in the 18th and 19th centuries, the musical became a major art form in the United States and the United Kingdom by the mid-20th century before spreading more widely. Despite this success and impact, the musical is often considered an inferior form of expression, especially when compared to opera. This negative comparison is unwarranted; the audience reach and artistic flexibility of the musical allows this art form to have significant social, political, and cultural impact.

Revolution -- its theory, practice, and applications -- is a topic that has a long relationship with the musical, including being the core theme of two of the ten top grossing musicals of all time: *Les Misérables* (1980) and *Hamilton* (2015). The former has been running, in multiple cities, continuously since its debut with a 35 year run in London, and the latter has gained a global reputation and ignited debates about formerly sacrosanct subjects. This module seeks to understand why and how revolutions have achieved such enduring success through the stage musical and what we can learn about revolution and representation. Students will be challenged to go beyond slick staging and catchy melodies to consider how both subversive and conservative

stage musical representations of revolution are. Themes including inclusion/exclusion, voice, appropriation, and nostalgia will be considered. Significant space will be opened for students to identify themes and topics relevant to them and to co-create this module's problem-based learning seminars.

[Module web page](#)

Module aims

This module extends and expands the Liberal Arts curriculum to include theatre, musicology, and further theoretical exploration of revolutions and revolutionary movements. It aims to provide students with a uniquely transdisciplinary approach to this exploration, giving a considered theoretical structure designed to empower students to be co-creators in this space. Ultimately, students will be asked to combine all relevant elements presented in this module to create a robust vision of how they conceive of the links between the art of the musical and revolution.

Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

This is an indicative syllabus, the details of which may change year on year:

Unit 1: Masters of the House: Situating revolution within the art of the musical.

Unit 2: Filling the Darkness with Order and Light: Les Miserables (1980) and the rise of a global revolution(?), including a film screening.

Unit 3: A Story of Those Who Always Loved You: Opera buffa, The Marriage of Figaro (1786), and the dangers of dissent.

Unit 4: The Never-ending Road to Calvary: Hamilton (2015) and revolutionary revision, including a film screening.

Unit 5: Somewhere Beyond the Barricades -- Urinetown (2001), satiric responses and the limits of revolution, plus film screening.

Unit 6: Like a Child Who is Lost in a Wood?: Making sense of art and revolution.

Unit 7: A World You Long to See: Presentation pitches.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- Identify and discuss the key characteristics of musicals and how these relate to the study of revolutions.
- Interpret and unpack musicals to determine how and why revolutionary movements are portrayed in specific manners.
- Draw connections between different revolutionary movements, their presentations via

musicals, and their relationship to real-world events and perspectives.

- Appraise the impact of musicals on the perception of revolutions.
- Design and produce an indicative artefact that expands the musical form to revolutions beyond the examples offered in the module.

Indicative reading list

As the specific musicals examined may change from year to year, this list is indicative only:

Arendt, H. (1963), *On Revolution*

Edney, K.A. (2009), *A New Brechtian Musical? An Analysis of Urinetown*

Hollman, M., G. Kotis (2001), *Urinetown*

Hunter, M. (1999), *The Culture of Opera Buffa in Mozart's Vienna: A Poetics of Entertainment*

Magee, J. (2018), *Miranda's Les Miz*

McMillin, H.S. (2006), *The Musical as Drama*

Miranda, L.-M. (2015), *Hamilton*

Mozart, W.A., P. Beaumarchais (1786), *The Marriage of Figaro*

Polzonetti, P. (2003), *Opera Buffa and the American Revolution*

Richards, B.F. (1999), *Musical Theatre: A Form of Political Expression*

Schonberg, C.-M., H. Kretzmer, A. Boubil, J.-M. Natel (1980), *Les Miserables*

Stephens, B., K. Grossman (2015), *Les Miserables and Its Afterlives: Between Page, Stage, and Screen*

[View reading list on Talis Aspire](#)

Research element

Students will be asked to prepare readings and other materials for weekly problem-based learning seminars. Because of the student-led nature of these seminars, identifying and engaging with a range of their source material, in addition to that suggested each week, is critical to the collective advancement of thinking and ideas. Independent research also forms a critical part of the assessments for the module.

Interdisciplinary

This module draws upon a range of disciplinary methodologies and offers the participants the opportunity to identify specific areas of focus meaningful to them and their backgrounds. This module is open to students from any department, and the rich mix of backgrounds will enhance the overall range and experience of discussions and debates.

International

This module builds in an international perspective to understanding revolution through the musical art form and actively creates space whereby students can engage with revolutionary movements and music from around the world.

Subject specific skills

Ability to generate relevant multidisciplinary problems through individual and small group research.

Individual and group research skills through multidisciplinary examinations of specific case studies.

Oral and written communication.

Digital literacy.

Professional communication.

Working with others.

Problem solving.

Information technology.

Research across various disciplines and using a variety of methods.

Peer review.

Transferable skills

Through this module, you will develop different skills that are sought by employers which will support your professional development. We have highlighted this to enable you to identify and reflect on the skills you have acquired and apply them throughout your professional journey including during the recruitment process whether this is in a CV/application form or at an interview.

Critical and independent thinking — developed through: Weekly tasks, readings, and homework; encounters with and employment of complex theories and Problem-Based Learning activities and in-class discussion.

Written communication – developed through: Research Essay; musical pitch; and weekly collaborative interactive task; with ongoing weekly formative feedback.

Oral communication – developed through: musical pitch where students propose a musical about a revolution (or, a revolutionary musical); and weekly seminar tasks and presentations.

Research and evaluation – developed through: Weekly problems and tasks that require the students to research and evaluate issues concerning identified topics; and the final research paper involves the formulation of their own research question and conducting their own in-depth reviews and analysis of theories, archival materials, case studies, or interpretations of expressive works

(mainly, but not limited to, stage musicals).

Time and self-management — developed through: Weekly group work and problems; weekly seminar preparation; musical pitch; and writing of research paper.

Study

Study time

Type	Required
Seminars	10 sessions of 2 hours (13%)
Other activity	9 hours (6%)
Private study	40 hours (27%)
Assessment	81 hours (54%)
Total	150 hours

Private study description

Approximately three hours per week (on average) will be dedicated to readings, tasks between seminars, group work, and preparation.

Other activity description

Timetabled screenings of the three musicals that serve as case studies (Les Miserables, Hamilton, Urinetown).

Costs

Category	Description	Funded by	Cost to student
Field trips, placements and study abroad	Optional performance visit, to be arranged based on ticket availability.	Student	£50.00

Assessment

You do not need to pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Assessment group A

	Weighting	Study time	Eligible for self-certification
The next big thing -- revolutionary musical design portfolio	50%	50 hours	Yes (extension)
Students will create a portfolio outlining their proposal for a new stage musical based on a revolution. They will combine themes drawn from across the artistic and theoretical discussions in their problem-based learning seminars, their module readings, and their independent learning. Creative responses will be encouraged, but a clear template will be provided to signpost basic structuring, essential components, and indicative word counts. This work will be built on their pitch presentations. including the summative and formative feedback received.			
Revolutionary musical pitch presentation	35%	25 hours	Yes (extension)
Students will work individually to produce a pitch for a new stage musical that focuses on a revolution. They will need to identify the revolution they wish to examine, research it, decide on what musical forms best amplify it, and then present their ideas to the wider group. Formative feedback will be provided by peers, in advance of the presentation, and reflection on this engagement will be part of the pitch. This acts as a way for students to sense-check and receive feedback on the idea that will develop into their portfolio assignment.			
Case study quizzes	15%	6 hours	Yes (extension)
Three Moodle-based quizzes, each linked to a specific musical used as a case study, will help students embed learning and promote engagement. Quizzes will be multiple choice, with five to eight questions based on the readings and screenings used in each case study.			

Feedback on assessment

General feedback for written assignments will be provided via Tabula. Detailed feedback appointments available for all students upon request. Group feedback will be provided via Tabula.

Availability

Courses

This module is Unusual option for:

- Year 3 of UVCA-LA99 Undergraduate Liberal Arts
- Year 4 of UVCA-LA98 Undergraduate Liberal Arts with Intercalated Year