

produced by Black playwrights, such as *Stars and Bars* and *Liberty Deferred*, for Dossett, “unmask performative devices used within white Living Newspapers that consolidate, even as they critique, the racial discourses that enforce black subordination” (81). Both productions used the narrative structure of the Living Newspaper to critique white narratives of Black life, where metanarrative devices put the gaze on white audience members for their facile responses to American racism.

Chapters 3 and 4 explore differing perceptions of masculinity, first in conceptions of heroism in the folkloric John Henry and the Bigger Thomas of the theatrical version of Richard Wright’s *Native Son*, and second in political ideologies of American capitalism, Garveyism, and communism in Theodore Ward’s *Big White Fog*. With John Henry and Bigger Thomas, Dossett draws our attention to how Black playwrights did not want their heroic ideals to redeem whiteness but instead to expose the system that creates them. And where *Big White Fog* has often been seen for its acceptance of communism as a solution to white supremacy, Dossett sees the play dealing with the failure of any ideology to help recover Black masculinity.

The final chapter looks to the successes of the Harlem Negro unit and productions that countered Orson Welles’s *Voodoo Macbeth* with historical depictions of the Haitian Revolution, and the Conclusion reminds us of the importance of theatre under the FTP for providing Black theatre makers a larger audience to appeal to and mainstream white theatre makers to contend against. Black theatre communities “found ways to use the very dramatic conventions and theatrical forms that had helped to construct what it meant to be a black person in America, to first tear down, and then rebuild, those images” (251).

Dossett connects the work of the FTP to the postwar Black theatre of Lorraine Hansberry and Amiri Baraka. More important, what makes Dossett’s work unique is her ability to connect script drafts to performance and theatre makers to audience. In the manuscripts, “black communities also created and debated roles that foregrounded black experiences, black history, and black heroes” (252). And Dossett’s book provides a necessary resurfacing of Black theatre beyond the stage to the community engagements that reveal the give-and-take of theatre making.

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Beyond Broadway: The Pleasure and Promise of Musical Theatre across America

By Stacy Wolf. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020; pp. 1 + 382, 30 illustrations. \$99 hardcover, \$29.95 paper, \$23.99 e-book.

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Stacy Wolf’s *Beyond Broadway: The Pleasure and Promise of Musical Theatre across America* immerses readers into musical theatre communities around the United

States, in schools, summer camps, outdoor festivals, dinner theatres, and more. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, this book would have been groundbreaking, but our current moment grants the work a poignancy and unintended nostalgia for a particular kind of theatrical abundance that existed less than a year ago.

The richness of the musical theatre performance scene outside of Broadway has been virtually untouched by scholarship thus far, considered largely unworthy of study. We have grown to expect a bit of cynicism when we talk about these much-maligned theatre forms, but instead the text generously points out what these forms offer their participants and audiences. The deserving do not escape necessary criticism, but overall the book is remarkable in its warmth and positivity.

The style manages the difficult feat of being simultaneously scholarly and accessible, offering a crossover to musical theatre studies for the nonacademic while also maintaining rigor for a scholarly audience. The book begins in a personal and engagingly straightforward manner: “The first musical I ever saw was *The Music Man* at the Burn Brae Dinner Theatre in 1970 when I was nine years old” (1). Just a few pages later, the book opens up into some of the larger theoretical questions it will consider: “*Beyond Broadway* illustrates the widespread presence and persistence of musical theatre in US culture, examining it not as an object or a cultural artifact (as much musical theatre scholarship does), but as a social practice, a doing, a live, visceral experience of creating, watching, listening” (5).

Wolf conducted more than three hundred interviews around the country for this project, resulting in a rich oral history. Each chapter is structured differently, with some following individuals, some a given show in different locations, and some an event or a season. All are united by a gently curious approach. Throughout, we meet fascinating and fully drawn real people. The chapters contain interesting overlaps; a teacher we encounter in one chapter has students in a production in another, for instance. This approach makes us feel like we are part of the communities being described.

In the first chapter Wolf introduces the unique world of the Junior Theatre Festival and Broadway Junior, huge conventions celebrating musical theatre for the middle-school set. She vividly describes the kids and their lived experience, poignantly following their individual journeys while also raising relevant criticisms of the commercialism, lack of musicians, fetishizing of boys, and economic disparity at play in these events. In Chapter 2, Wolf writes about the world of the “backstage diva,” here a woman in San Anselmo, California, named Marilyn Izdebski, who stands for a type the author argues you find in every town: “The female musical theatre director who works with kids after school and on the weekends, who teaches them dance or drama, and who directs them in shows can be found in most American towns” (71). This chapter argues that backstage divas are largely female and doesn’t as fully consider gay male mentors in this category. This absence perhaps makes the role less universal than as described, but Wolf’s portrayal is potent and moving nonetheless.

In Chapter 3 Wolf examines one of the most ubiquitous musical theatre experiences—the high-school musical—by following three productions of *Into the Woods* across the Midwest, in three very different high schools. The incredibly rich subject suggests an area where scholars following Wolf’s footsteps could find abundant fodder for future research. The author raises questions about the ways diversity and politics impact these shows, the way they encompass town values, and how they

function as ritual, empower their students, and offer their own internal cultures. This chapter also points out the need for support of the arts in schools, a theme that quietly rings throughout the entire book.

Chapter 4 works to reclaim the generally derided, but nonetheless omnipresent, community-theatre arena, via an examination of the consortium of community theatres that perform at the Kelsey Theatre at Mercer County Community College in New Jersey. The chapter examines a year's worth of their workings, from season planning through show closings, while interrogating the ideas of professionalism and "serious leisure" (165). Wolf then travels in Chapter 5 to the Bay Area, to Austin, Texas, and back to New Jersey, where three large-scale, nonprofessional outdoor summer theatres all produce *The Sound of Music*. We have the best seat in the house due to her firsthand, evocatively detailed accounts of attending each large amphitheatre-style production. Wolf examines this subset of theatre performance with an eye for local detail, while also pointing out the commonality of how each theatre performs citizenship and civic pride.

In Chapter 6, Wolf tells the tale of an even smaller subset of musical theatre experience—summer camp productions at Jewish girls' camps in Maine—and offers intriguing details, like the breakneck speed with which these "bunk shows" go up in less than a week, every week, all summer. The chapter also examines how these musicals interact with feminist ideals and religious identity: "Today, Jewishness and feminism are at once everywhere and nowhere at summer camp, informing minute details of the countless hourly, daily, and weekly rituals, but seldom spoken aloud or marked as Jewishness or feminism per se" (230–1). Then, in what is perhaps the text's most controversial stance, at least in the world of theatre scholarship, Chapter 7 views the Disney Musicals in Schools program through a positive lens. Wolf details all the criticism Disney has rightfully received but nonetheless praises the corporation's work taking theatre production to underserved schools and thereby diversifying the young students who are exposed to theatre.

In a road trip with four visits to different venues along Colorado's Front Range, Wolf examines dinner theatres in Chapter 8. Though this unique form of producing musical theatre is in the process of dying off across the nation, it still flourishes in this region. Wolf is most generous toward her experience at the least polished of the four theatres. It is this book's continued radical act to consider generously the joy and pleasure these often derided theatres offer their community participants and audiences, rather than to focus on their artistic flaws.

Indeed, theatre community is a central theme of the book, and in today's pandemic-ridden world it feels almost heartbreaking to read about these communities while wondering what has become of the inhabitants we have gotten to know in these pages, some of whom made their livings in the theatre and all of whom have something indelibly meaningful lost to them right now. Published late in 2019, this book documents, just in time, a theatrical world that may never be the same again. More hopefully, the book lays the groundwork for future scholarship to examine the multiplicity of these musical theatre worlds we plan to reclaim, one day soon.