

WRITING & STAGING
A New Musical

A Handbook

JYE BRYANT

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Preface

So you want to write a new musical? Maybe you've got hopes of being the next Andrew Lloyd-Webber, Stephen Sondheim or Lin-Manuel Miranda. Perhaps you've recently seen a musical and thought: 'Hey, I wanna do that! I wanna set an inspiring story to music and choreographed movement and I wanna earn big money doing it!' Maybe you've even finished writing your own musical and are wondering what the next step is. Whatever stage of contemplation, development or execution you're at, this book aims to assist you in getting your work finished, staged and out into the musical theatre world.

Now, I think it's important to explicitly state that this is by no means a rule book. You have not purchased *Jye's Fifty Commandments of Writing and Staging Musical Theatre* – nor should you want to! There are no thou shalt nots and you are not in danger of eternal punishments. However, what I *do* hope to provide you with is a comprehensive list of mistakes and misjudgements I've personally made whilst writing and staging my own musicals. Hindsight, as they say, is a wonderful teacher and I hope the many tips, tricks and templates I share in this handbook will serve as an insightful chaperone that will guide you merrily along the not so yellow bricked road of musical theatre writing.

While I have learned plenty of things over the past fifteen years (or so), I do not claim to be an expert or authority on the subject. There are many different schools of thought and each has its own loyal followers and merits. Therefore, the contents of this handbook are entirely subjective and my own personal opinion which you can take or leave as required.

Lastly, there is no guaranteed outcome. You may have read every book on the musical theatre writing shelf and followed every established rule (to nauseating detail) but still go on to produce a majestic flop.

There are many, many variables in achieving success, however, I believe we can utilise the mistakes of others as building blocks that we can stack in the direction of our own successes.

So now, with all these tips, tricks and templates, let's fumble along together!

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Musical Theatre.

Noun. A genre of dramatic arts which uses singing, dancing and acting to explore and express heightened states of human emotion and experience.

J.Bryant

Writing A New Musical



1. Find a story that ‘sings’

Not every story can be turned into a toe-tapping musical extravaganza featuring elaborate ensemble numbers or powerful, show-stopping ballads. Some stories are best suited to other creative mediums such as film or dance.

Good writers not only pen melodious scores or riveting monologues, they also excel at choosing the appropriate creative platform to catapult their story or message as they know that breaking randomly into song can often seem contrived or laboured. If your story doesn’t ‘sing’ then it probably shouldn’t be a musical.

2. Write what you want to see on stage

What type of musical theatre inspires you? Is it bright comedy laced with bawdy numbers performed by full-figured women or sensitive stories

filled with soft and emotive soliloquies? Whatever you find entertaining, thought-provoking or meaningful, write that! If you're not sold on the message or story then how will you be able to sell it to potential producers or audiences?

3. Keep in mind logistics and stage-ability

Size *always* matters so how many people will be in your cast? How extensive is your orchestration? How big does your venue need to be? Is your show going to be financially viable to stage? These will be factored in when people consider staging your work. Musical Theatre can be expensive so if you're planning on flying helicopters through the roof or you want to feature falling chandeliers then it's going to cost you a lot of money. Potential producers are not likely to be staging an expensive new musical if they might struggle to find an audience. Keep this in mind from the very beginning: it's important to dream big, but do it on a budget.

4. Use your writer's intuition

Trust in your vision as a creator as no one has your skill set or your perception of the world so use your uniqueness to your advantage. Don't be put off by the criticism of others (particularly those who fail to see your vision). If you believe in your book, script or score then trust your writer's intuition and share it with the world.

5. Collaborate if you don't have the skill set

Rodgers and Hammerstein, Lerner and Lowe, Gilbert and Sullivan, Lloyd Webber and Rice, the list is endless when it comes to great musical theatre collaborations. It is important to always play to your strengths and avoid taking on too many roles (particularly if you're lacking the skills). If you can write beautiful, meandering melodies but your lyrics are rather dull then it might be best to search for a lyrical lid to your musical pot.

The best kind of theatre is the kind
that leaves you changed
– for the better, for the worse – it
transforms you.

J.Bryant

WRITING A NEW MUSICAL (CHECKLIST)

Pre-Writing Stage	
	Find compatible collaborators for each of the Creative Team roles (Book Writer, Script Writer, Lyricist, Composer, Orchestrator, etc.)
	Write and negotiate job descriptions for each role of the Creative Team
	Decide on the topic, theme or story (ideally, a story that ‘sings’)
	Choose an appropriate title (and subtitle)
	Obtain permission/rights (if the material is pre-existing)
	Determine the show's audience or fan base (Age? Sex? Level of Education?)
	Decide on the type of musical (musical comedy, operetta, revue, etc.)
	Determine the ideal structure (How many acts? How many scenes? Overall duration?)
	Choose the characters and establish the ideal cast size
	Decide on the type and size of the orchestration/band arrangement
Writing Stage	
	Plot out the overall story structure (conflicts and resolutions)
	Establish each character’s journey (What do they want? What gets in their way? How will they be transformed?)
	Identify potential song opportunities
	Establish the main musical themes (Melodies, rhythms, etc.)
	Write the script, lyrics and music
	Edit the script, lyrics and music

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	Rewrite the script, lyrics and music (if necessary)
	Orchestrate or arrange the musical score (or source an orchestrator/arranger)
Workshopping Stage	
	Invite performers and industry professionals to a workshop where they can provide <i>constructive</i> feedback
	Consider the feedback from the workshop and rewrite or edit as required
	Hold a second workshop (if necessary)
	Hold a third workshop (if necessary)
	Look for opportunities to stage the musical or its songs

Collaborating On A New Musical



6. Create job descriptions

Job descriptions can protect individuals, relationships and shows, so make sure your creative roles are clearly defined from the beginning of the process. Who is the lyricist? Who will be writing the book? Who is composing the music? These might seem like obvious questions to ask but without explicitly agreed roles you might find yourself being quasi-lyricist-sometimes-composer-sort-of-co-author and all the while only being credited for one of those roles.

7. Know your strengths and limits

Good collaborations are based on a delicate balance of personal strengths, therefore, it's important to know what you're good at and

what you're not so good at, that way all parties can assist each other through the (sometimes) arduous and (often) complicated process of writing a musical.

8. Share a similar level of experience

Unless you want to fall into the student-mentor type of collaboration you should find someone who is similarly-yolked, that is, someone with as many production plumes in their theatrical fedora as you. If you're finding yourself saying: "well, in my experience..." then you may very well be playing the teacher and that is a tiring and (often) thankless role.

9. Share a mutual enthusiasm for the project

For your musical to have the greatest chance at success, you need a passionate and committed collaborative team who will be eager to announce the arrival of your new musical with a strong and resounding fanfare. However, if you're the only one who is constantly driving the project then you might need to reflect on the dedication of your fellow writers. Without the enthusiasm and validation of everyone on-board, the required fanfare could sound more like a lone and fatally-wounded trumpeter and who is going to financially back a show that only some of its writers believe in?

10. Have compatible writing practices

Be sure that you're working with people who you're compatible with. If you're used to the lyrics being written first but now you're working with someone who likes to construct a melody before anything else then this may well be a strain on the collaboration. Similarly if you like to write every Tuesday and your writing partners like to write "whenever the time is right", you may find that you're fighting an uphill battle. Remember: compatibility is important in any relationship and although you may not be sharing a bed with your fellow creators you may well be sharing custody of your creation for the rest of your life!

*Write the shows you want to see and create
the world you want to live in.*

J.Bryant

About The Author



Jye Bryant is a Sydney-based, Australian Musical Theatre Composer, Lyricist, Producer and Author with a passion for Theatre, Education and Social Justice. Using witty lyrics and hummable melodies, his work aims to inspire positive social change through a unique blend of entertainment and education.

Jye Bryant's compositions are performed regularly on Cabaret circuits, where he has gained popularity as the composer of choice for many high profile international artists.

Although Jye Bryant trained as a Secondary School Music Teacher, he has spent most of his adult life as a Youth Worker and Adult Educator using his diverse skill set to better the lives of children and young people.

Some of his work, to date, includes: *The Things I Could Never Tell Steven* (2015 & 2017), *The Oldest Profession* (2016), *The Velveteen Rabbit* (2013), *In Bed With Jye (& Friends)* (2012), *Rainbow Tears* (2007), *Aladdin Goes To Africa* (2007), *Peter Pan* (2006), *Cinderella Meets Her Prince* (2005), *Sleeping Beautifully* (2004) and many, many more.

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