

INSTRUCTIONS: Give your opinion on why so many rights holders and administrators are trying to develop Broadway productions based on their song catalog copyrights. Your analysis of the pros and cons of such exploitation.

Pros & Cons of Placement of Artists Songs in Broadway Musicals for Further Exploitation

Rights holders and administrators develop Broadway productions based on their song catalog copyrights most likely because it's another revenue stream – not just in money made by Grand Rights licensing¹ but also in the money to be made off of printing sheet music that often may be purchased by schools² or played on pianos in homes. With streaming paying pennies and less than was made when consumers were buying more CDs, mechanical payouts are less³ and thus the investment needs to be recouped somehow.

At first, one would think this route is for those who aren't putting out new music, not at their peak of performance, and still trying to stay relevant. It's re-introducing music to a new audience, perhaps a younger audience who may not be aware of the music. But you think of something like the Green Day musical "American Idiot"⁴ and they were a more recent band than, say, The

¹ *What are "Grand Rights"?* (n.d.). <https://help.songtrust.com/knowledge/what-are-grand-rights>

² Hunckler, M. (2024, March 31). MusicSpoke looks to disrupt \$1 billion sheet music industry with marketplace for Artist-Owned scores. *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/matthunckler/2017/10/25/musicspoke-looks-to-disrupt-1-billion-sheet-music-industry-with-marketplace-for-artist-owned-scores/?sh=4851fcdc5eb2>

³ Browne, D. (2019, October 14). Inside the new wave of rock musicals. *Rolling Stone*. <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/inside-the-new-wave-of-rock-musicals-198908/>

⁴ Browne, D. (2019, October 14). Inside the new wave of rock musicals. *Rolling Stone*. <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/inside-the-new-wave-of-rock-musicals-198908/>

Temptations⁵. This brings a traditional artform more into the foreground. One might say a lot of theaters struggle because of lack of new interest, potentially due to a younger generation being more drawn to Netflix and video games. And thus, having newer or more recognizable music in the shows will help with this issue. That being said, there are others that say new media has actually helped bring awareness of shows into homes and to new audiences.⁶

The reason I think having music in more traditional theater productions is relevant – especially for more up-and-coming bands – is in the age of streaming and passive listening, it's hard to break through and build a loyal fan base when there's so much choice⁷ and you're not being forced to listen to the music due to skippable, interactive capabilities. Look how many musicals wind up becoming movie musicals (i.e. *Mamma Mia*⁸, *Wicked*⁹, *West Side Story*¹⁰). Now one is making money off of their music through sync licensing. And to circle back to the new media discussion, one can replay the movie musical over and over again without having to pay for a live theater ticket. Now, it's debatable whether earnings are more through attendance at live shows rather than the recurring royalties paid out via blanket licensing from services like Hulu or Netflix, probably depending on the musical. But think about during the height of the pandemic when no one was going to shows – theater still had a place in homes.

⁵ *Ain't too proud – The life and times of the temptations on Broadway*. (n.d.).

<https://ainttooproudmusical.com/>

⁶ *Digital streaming platforms emerge as live theatre shifts online*. (2021, December 16). Playbill.

<https://playbill.com/article/digital-streaming-platforms-emerge-as-live-theatre-shifts-online>

⁷ *Spotify and the paradox of choice*. (2023, October 11). Time Spent Offline.

<https://mehretbiruk.com/2021/06/22/paradox-of-choice/>

⁸ Musicaltheatrelivesinmesite. (2019, March 27). *What's the difference: Mamma Mia on stage and on screen*. Musical Theatre Lives in Me.

<https://musicaltheatrelivesinmesite.wordpress.com/2018/10/08/whats-the-difference-mamma-mia-on-stage-and-on-screen/>

⁹ Gibson, K. (2024, February 12). *Everything to know about the Wicked Movie*. Peoplemag.

<https://people.com/movies/wicked-movie-everything-to-know/>

¹⁰ Brody, R. (2021, December 15). Review: Steven Spielberg's "West Side Story" remake is worse than the original. *The New Yorker*.

<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/the-front-row/review-steven-spielbergs-west-side-story-remake-is-worse-than-the-original>

So what are the downsides? It could be seen as source music taking over new songs or compositions that normally would give jobs to those writing for these shows. But there wouldn't be a Green Day musical without Green Day music so one could say a particular show wouldn't even exist then and thus, not putting someone out of work. Right now, I would say there is a good blend of shows utilizing artist material (e.g. *Jagged Little Pill*¹¹) that already exists vs new music (e.g. *Hamilton*¹²). But because of this, on the flip side, one could say that less shows with new music are around because there's only so many theaters and money to go around to produce that shows with artist material are minimizing the potential for new show tunes to be produced. Coming from a musical theater background, I see this as a con.

That being said, from my perspective, the pros and cons are even. Although, if the goal is to bring in a younger audience to the theater, I think what Lin-Manuel Miranda did with *Hamilton* was the right approach – it was original music but the style of the music was more modernized. One could also try incorporating original source music along with new songs or compositions in their musical. I also think the classics are such for a reason – *Phantom of the Opera* will come around again because the music and story is so good that, in comparison, a musical like *Once Upon a One More Time* with music from Britney Spears¹³ would probably not have the same longevity (although I may be surprised). But everyone has their own cup of tea and I think the more options we have for art and music to expand and be consumed, the better.

¹¹ Browne, D. (2019, October 14). Inside the new wave of rock musicals. *Rolling Stone*.
<https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/inside-the-new-wave-of-rock-musicals-198908/>

¹² Churchwell, S. (2020, March 26). Why *Hamilton* is making musical history. *The Guardian*.
<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2016/nov/05/why-hamilton-is-making-musical-history>

¹³ *Once Upon a One More Time*. (2023, August 29). *Once Upon A One More Time* | Official site.
<https://onemoretimemusical.com/>