

Impact of Musical Theater on College Students' Art Education

Han Xu^{1*}

¹ Jeonbuk National University, Jeonju, Korea

Email Address

1044749024@qq.com (Han Xu)

*Correspondence: 1044749024@qq.com

Received: 18 July 2024; **Accepted:** 12 August 2024; **Published:** 10 September 2024

Abstract:

Musical theatre, as a new form of stage art that emerged in the early 20th century, has continued to develop with its unique artistic expressions. After undergoing several generations of transformation, it has now become a form of artistic and economic integration. The role of musical theatre in the art education of ordinary college students in contemporary China is significant. This article focuses on higher education music education, using the characteristics of musical theatre as the starting point. By explaining the characteristics of musical theatre art, it analyzes the artistic educational value of musical theatre in higher education and further proposes measures to incorporate musical theatre into the art education of college students. Lastly, it analyzes the artistic practice of musical theatre in higher education music education.

Keywords:

Musical Theater, Arts Education, College Students, College Music Education

1. Introduction

Musical theater is a stage form characterized by its rapid development, strong inclusivity, and flexible expressive ways in today's society [1]. It is based on drama, using singing and movement to convey stories and characters' emotions. Since the introduction of musical theater to China in the 1980s, its development has mainly focused on the commercial introduction of classic works. Audiences have become familiar with and enamored by classic productions like "Mamma Mia!", "Les Misérables", "Cats", and "Chicago". With the continuous advancement of society and the trend of cultural diversity, musical theater as a comprehensive performance art form is gradually moving beyond traditional entertainment into the realm of higher education, providing students with new learning and development opportunities. The rise of musical theater in universities reflects a pursuit of artistic education diversity and an exploration of comprehensive student development. Musical theater not only combines various artistic elements such as music, dance, and drama but also requires students to possess solid performance skills and teamwork abilities. It has thus become a platform for fostering students comprehensively [2]. Additionally, musical theater holds rich social and cultural value, promoting cultural prosperity, inheriting excellent traditional culture, promoting national spirit, and facilitating exchange and

integration among different cultures.

2. Characteristics of Musical Art in College Music Education

A musical is a comprehensive art form that seamlessly combines European classical art, modern popular elements, entertainment, and traditional values. The main content of a musical includes music, lyrics, dialogue, and script. In most cases, musicals also utilize terms from opera, referring to lyrics and script together as “libretto”. A musical’s script usually runs for 2-3 hours, typically consisting of two acts with an intermission between them. Musical content is easy to understand and greatly loved by the masses. The main characteristics of musical art are mainly reflected in the following aspects.

(1) Strong Inclusivity of Constituent Elements

Musicals are an art form that integrates music, dance, and drama. Overall, the constituent elements of musicals encompass most existing art forms worldwide, showing strong inclusivity. These elements involve literary elements, dramatic elements, poetic elements, musical elements, dance elements, and acrobatic elements. Musicals highly fuse art forms with different aesthetic categories, aesthetic approaches, and artistic charms, providing audiences with a comprehensive theatrical aesthetic effect transcending space and time, combining visual and auditory elements alongside expressions and forms.

(2) Diverse Content of Productions

Musicals are not a singular art form; their singing styles range from classical to various popular styles, covering a wide range of themes from ancient to modern times, including light comedy, farce, science fiction, and mythology among others. Musicals are relatively free from fixed patterns. The music traditions encompass jazz, rock, country, disco, and blues, with some musicals focusing on opera while others highlight light music and dance, presenting a wide array of vibrant musical productions.

(3) Having commercial characteristics

Musicals are all about copyright. They generally aren't sold to theaters; they only hit the market after being shown in theaters. One reason is that musicals really make you feel like you're right there in the moment. Also, during the breaks in musical performances, it's usually when business negotiations happen among European and American aristocrats. Putting on a musical can bring in more funds. Whether it's the production process or hiring actors, the economic benefits play a significant role. Musicals are audience-oriented shows with entertainment value, and they operate and develop against the backdrop of advancing social technology and improving audience aesthetics. “The Sound of the Silk Road”, co-created by Shaanxi Travel Group and the American Broadway Nederlander Global Entertainment Company, blends various dance and music elements from East and West, showcasing the artistic charm of musicals in a profound way. It has been widely loved and praised by the public, earning certain economic benefits through national tours. In addition to traditional theatrical elements, musicals also integrate various art forms like sculpture and magic. The modernization style features of musical works are becoming increasingly prominent. It's not just an art form; it's an art form with extremely high commercial value. When creating and performing musicals, it's important to highlight the individuality of the musical, focus on commercial promotion and operation, and strike

a balance between artistic and commercial elements. Don't compromise the quality of the work for commercial purposes [4].

(4) More flexible works

Musical constantly innovates in music composition, instrumental accompaniment, and language selection to meet market demands and avoid being restricted by formality. It heavily draws from the tradition of musical comedy, focusing on themes of joy and comedy. In essence, there are no set rules in the creation and expression of musical theatre, allowing for boldness and innovation to continuously inspire creators to deliver superior musical theatre experiences to audiences.

(5) More modern style

Musical represents an art form that evolves according to current audience needs and aesthetic preferences, ranging from early jazz music to rock musicals and even country music musicals, all adapting to popular tastes. Despite this evolution, the style of musical theatre remains highly modernized. In terms of dance, musical theatre moves beyond traditional American tap dance, incorporating various styles such as ballet and modern dance. Advancements in modern technology have also influenced stage design, with more musical theatre productions incorporating cutting-edge set design techniques, videos, lighting, and other elements to offer audiences a higher quality artistic experience.

3. The Value of Musical Art Education in College Education

(1) Cultivating students' aesthetic ability

Watching musicals at universities not only helps improve students' artistic appreciation, but also broadens their cultural horizons and promotes overall personal development. Musical theatre provides a mix of artistic elements, including music, dance, drama, and visual arts, offering students a wide field of artistry. Audiences can enjoy a variety of music styles and themes in musicals, from classical to pop, from narrative to abstract, from comedy to tragedy. This diversity allows students to experience various artistic expressions [5]. Such experiences help students develop an understanding and appreciation of different art forms, expand their aesthetic concepts, and enable them to comprehend and appreciate artwork more comprehensively. Musicals typically emphasize the coordination of music, dance, and stage design, striving for a perfect audio-visual presentation. Audiences can perceive beauty in the musical melodies, dance choreography, and stage settings. Through this experience, students gradually cultivate a sense of beauty perception, learn to appreciate details and the overall presentation in artworks, and enhance their aesthetic emotions. Musicals often incorporate elements from different regions and cultural backgrounds, showcasing diversity through various music styles, costumes, and dances. When watching and participating in musicals, students become more open to accepting diverse cultural expressions, enhancing their ability for cross-cultural communication. This contributes to building a more diverse and inclusive society.

(2) Exercising students' performance skills

Musical theater performances require students to have skills in singing, dancing, and acting, among other things. Participating in rehearsals and performances not only helps students improve their artistic abilities, but also boosts their confidence and stage presence. Students in musical theater need excellent singing skills. Actors need to convey the emotions and development of the plot through songs in musicals. This

requires them to have a sense of musical rhythm, pitch control, and vocal expression. Through constant rehearsal and performance, students can enhance their singing skills, including vocal control, expanding vocal range, and emotional expression, which is extremely helpful for future careers in music or stage performance. Musical theater also demands high-level dance skills from students. Dance is an essential element in musical theater, requiring actors to have excellent physical coordination, rhythm, and expressiveness. By learning and participating in musical theater dance rehearsals, students can improve their dance skills, develop physical fitness, enhance strength and endurance, and foster collaboration and teamwork. This positively impacts students' physical fitness and health. Musical theater performances require actors to have excellent acting skills. They need to understand the emotions and psychology of their characters, and be able to convey the characters' inner feelings and plot development through performance. This includes skills in emotional expression, delivering lines, and coordinating movements. By participating in rehearsals and performances of musical theater, students can improve their acting skills, develop emotional expression techniques, strengthen their acting and stage presence, which is crucial for enhancing their competitiveness in the fields of theater, film, and television.

(3) Stimulating students' creativity

Engaging students in university musical theater not only helps improve their performance skills and artistic appreciation, but also sparks their creativity and nurtures their artistic innovation. Scriptwriting for musicals is a crucial avenue for students to flex their creative muscles. They can contribute to crafting the script, developing various storylines and shaping character personalities, which poses a challenge to their creative abilities. Through scriptwriting participation, students learn to construct engaging narratives and enhance their storytelling and dramatic structure skills. This creative experience ignites their imagination, giving them more confidence to pursue their creative dreams. Musical arrangement for musical theater provides another key opportunity for students to unleash their creativity. They can be involved in arranging and adapting music, creating unique musical elements to complement the plot and character emotions. This calls for a deep understanding of musical theory and skills, coupled with a creative mindset to produce music pieces that harmonize with the musical's storyline. By engaging in music arrangement, students develop their music composition skills and enhance their musical talents. Stage design for musical theater also offers students a platform to showcase their creativity. From stage settings to costume design, students can engage in various aspects of creative work, infusing their ideas into the actual production of the musical. This creative process requires students to translate abstract ideas into tangible artistic works, fostering their aesthetic sensibilities and artistic skills.

(4) Cultivating teamwork among students

The success of a musical depends on the effort and close cooperation of every participant, helping students develop teamwork skills, enhance their collective awareness, and lay a solid foundation for their future careers and social life. Rehearsing and performing a musical requires students to actively communicate and coordinate with others. Different roles need to collaborate actors, playwrights, directors, musicians, dancers, and stage crew members must work closely together to ensure the smooth running of the entire performance. Throughout this process, students need to learn to listen and understand others' viewpoints, negotiate and solve problems, thus developing their communication and collaboration skills. The

successful performance of a musical is inseparable from the close cooperation within the team. Each member plays an indispensable role and they must coordinate their actions under tight deadlines to ensure a high-quality performance. This collaborative experience helps students overcome challenges, fostering their awareness and ability to cooperate within a team. They learn to divide tasks, support each other, and form a tacit understanding as a whole to achieve common goals. The process of a musical performance also helps cultivate students' collective awareness. They realize that their performance is closely linked to the success of the entire team, thus focusing more on the team's interests. This collective awareness is not only beneficial for musical performances but also plays a role in students' future careers, helping them adapt better to diverse team working environments.

4. Infiltration of Musical Related Measures in the Art Education of College Students

Currently, the Chinese musical theater market is continuously bringing in excellent Broadway classic musical works, but despite more and more showings, the overall box office results are not satisfactory. A big reason for this is that Chinese musical theater lacks true localization, causing Western art imported to China to face challenges. In this situation, we need to be rooted in our own culture and value original local musical theater works. University students are a very important group for the thriving Chinese musical theater market - they are highly sensitive to new things, proactive, and have a strong ability to learn new concepts. They can not only become an important consumer group but also potential outstanding creative talents in the future. The musical theater market must pay attention to this force. As a form of "acquired taste," for musical theater to reach the masses, it must undergo a long process of market cultivation. Therefore, it is highly important to cultivate the audience's aesthetic taste starting from university students. The artistic appreciation and enthusiasm for theater displayed by university students should be cherished by this industry. Talent, originality, and capital are the three key factors for the development of musical theater, and university students are an important and potential force driving the professionalization of musical theater development. So, how to incorporate musical theater practice into the artistic education of ordinary university students is a question that relevant universities and teachers should explore.

(1) Offering elective courses in public art related to musical theater

Right now, only Beijing Dance Academy, Shanghai Theatre Academy, Central Academy of Drama, Nanjing University of the Arts, and others offer majors in musical theatre. For regular college students, offering elective courses in musical theatre as part of the general arts curriculum is the most feasible approach. Since musical theatre requires a high level of artistic integration, the demands on instructors are also high. This means that teachers need to actively keep learning, and the curriculum shouldn't just cover the origins and history of musical theatre – it's best if students can deeply understand musical theatre through practical involvement in productions. This teaching method not only boosts student engagement and makes university classes more engaging and diverse, but also strengthens the relationship between teachers and students. With its high level of interactivity, it serves as a bridge for communication between teachers and students, helping instructors assess how well students are grasping the material.

(2) Integrate musical theater practice into daily rehearsals

Artistic practice is an important part of college art education for students. Nowadays, many universities have student art groups and other art societies. For these choirs, drama groups, and dance groups, they can incorporate elements of musicals into their daily rehearsals. For example, a choir can rehearse some musical segments, allowing students to take a break from the big choir and experience the singing style of popular music in musicals. Similarly, drama group members are more expressive and good at imitation on stage, so by enhancing vocal and dance training on this basis, and with the guidance of professional musical teachers and the efforts of students, they can definitely stage a classic musical. If these works can make it to the big stage of various literary and art performances in schools, they will once again convey the charm of musicals to other students, thus forming a virtuous cycle.

(3) Colleges and universities strengthen cooperation with theaters and troupes

Many contemporary college students place a high value on improving their own qualities and cultivation. Their love for the arts and reverence for classics can sometimes be beyond imagination. Schools should strengthen communication and collaboration with local theaters, and when introducing excellent works, strive to attract students to watch by offering student group ticket advantages. Schools that are able should actively bring in excellent musicals for campus performances. This is a great opportunity to promote artistic education concepts to the entire school community and build campus culture, immersing the university campus in a rich artistic atmosphere. All of this requires teachers engaged in arts education to value musicals in their thinking, fully understand the significant role of musicals in promoting the cause of artistic education, and then make efforts to promote and popularize musicals in practice.

5. Analysis of the Practice of Musical in Music Education in Colleges

When practicing high school musical theater, the key is to portray the characters perfectly to showcase the charm of stage art. Musical theater practice creates a unique atmosphere that truly immerses you in its magic. Since musical theater performances involve various artistic aspects, the performers are required to excel in dance, music, and acting to portray their roles effectively, convey the storyline, and evoke emotions in the audience [6]. Different types of musical theater productions need to meet performance requirements in terms of sound, body movements, and imagery among others.

(1) Promoting the artistic practice of musical theater with dance

From the perspective of theatrical performance, performers should deeply study the background and content of the musical before taking the stage. They should analyze the living environment and emotional world of the characters in the play. Only with a clear understanding of the roles can they better portray the characters' traits. Additionally, in the practice of musical theater art, one must express the intentions of the characters through actions and carefully analyze their behavioral goals and motivations during character development. For example, in the musical "Invitation To Wine" by MaDa, Li Bai's life experiences are presented to the audience in a retrospective manner. Through heartfelt performance based on a thorough understanding of the musical's content, performers can show more people the brilliant life of Li Bai and the joys and sorrows behind it. The entire musical integrates many elements of traditional Chinese drama, selecting a large number of folk songs in the music arrangement and arranging the singing sections according to the rhythm of

ancient Chinese musical instruments from various dynasties. In the dance design, a plethora of classical, courtly, and ethnic Oriental dance elements are incorporated to recreate the grandeur of the flourishing Tang Dynasty era. Furthermore, the stage art also becomes a key highlight of “Invitation To Wine”, blending Eastern aesthetics with modern technology, utilizing artificial intelligence to create lush bamboo forests, brightly lit Chang’an city, and bustling marketplaces, presenting audiences with a cinematic-like experience. Performers narrate Chinese traditional culture in a Western artistic manner, aiming to convey Eastern aesthetics and cultural essence through Western artistic forms.

(2) Promoting the artistic practice of musical theater through dance

From the perspective of dance performance, it can create better performance scenarios, express characters' emotions and thoughts, thereby enhancing the artistic image of characters in musical theater practice. Because dance performances use body language to express musical ideas, in musical theater practice, the rhythm and changes in dance are linked to the musical plot. Through changes in dance, the plot twists and emotional depth can be expressed, requiring professional musical performers to be proficient in various types of dance in order to enrich and enhance the expression of musical theater and better shape the characters. For example, the musical “Cats” is an annual dance extravaganza about the Jellicle cat family, where all the cats participate to select the cat that will ascend to the “Heaviside Layer”. Various cats appear on stage, performing with gusto, and ultimately Grizabella, the adorable little cat, sings “Memory”, moving every cat in the audience to tears, earning her the title of “the cat that can ascend to heaven”. This musical adopts a Broadway-style dance, with a relatively simple plot and a predominantly jazz music style with various electronic elements, presenting a dreamlike musical in a vivid and lifelike manner. The music throughout the musical is very melodious, with the choreography using numerous dance scenes to showcase the various characteristics of the cats, ranging from lively tap dances to grand ballet, and energetic jazz and modern dances, making it innovative and magnificent, leaving the audience enchanted.

(3) Promoting the artistic practice of musical theater by singing

In terms of musical theater performances, performers should focus on improving their singing skills to make their character portrayals more comprehensive and engaging in musicals, creating a connection with the audience emotionally. Additionally, by analyzing the internal thoughts of the characters, understanding the emotions during singing, and clarifying the character's singing intentions, the live performance can be enhanced. Enriching the musical emotions through singing techniques brings musical theater into the realm of real-life musical arts practice. Teachers may fall into teaching pitfalls by avoiding experimenting with various forms of musical performances, which can lead to students feeling bored and unmotivated to express themselves musically, hindering their ability to experience a richer range of musical emotions and overall musical development. Therefore, teachers should change their teaching perspectives, actively adopt various forms of expression to enhance students' musical thinking effectively, allowing them to have a deeper understanding of musical emotions. Teachers should create a positive musical atmosphere and teaching environment, making the content of musical theater teaching more engaging and leaving a profound impression on the artistic effects of music to boost students' enthusiasm for learning musical theater. Concurrently, teachers should introduce modern and innovative musical elements, integrating script, dance, songs,

and other elements organically to further shape the image of musical theater and comprehensively improve students' core musical qualities. Throughout the process of musical theater arts practice, teachers can guide students in exploring the rules of music, dance, and other elements, integrating their own musical concepts into works to achieve good musical artistic effects. Of course, teachers should firmly grasp auxiliary teaching methods, passing on foundational knowledge of musical theater such as expressions, gestures, and continuously enhancing students' performance awareness to deepen their understanding of the essence of musical theater and further enhance their language expression abilities.

(4) Deepening the artistic practice of musical theater with cultural compatibility

Nowadays, music culture shows a lot of diversity, and musical theatre art practice is built upon this diversity. In this scenario, the way musicals are performed has also changed significantly. It's not just about using traditional operatic singing techniques anymore; it involves singing in various styles like storytelling and different musical genres to better cater to the modern audience's preferences. Therefore, in the specific process of teaching musical theatre, teachers should consider the diverse characteristics of music, take into account various singing styles, and provide students with appropriate guidance. They should continuously innovate in singing language, content, and methods to help students adapt to the needs of modern society and ensure that the value of musical theatre in vocal teaching can be better realized. However, some vocal teachers tend to focus on imparting Western cultural knowledge or overlook the differences and similarities between different cultures, as well as the diversity of Chinese traditional culture, which can affect the effectiveness of teaching. For instance, in teaching ethnic music, introducing traditional Chinese cultural works like "Dream of the Red Chamber" can help students understand Chinese traditional culture, enhance their cultural literacy, and enable them to better express the emotions of characters in their singing. Another example is the original musical "The Orphan of Zhao", inspired by Ji Junxiang, which is rooted in two different theatrical contexts blending traditional moral values and modern individual expressions, offering an interpretation of classical tragedy that has been passed down for thousands of years. Through inheritance and transformation, "The Orphan of Zhao" has become internationally acclaimed for its grand themes of humanity, deep historical roots, and broad cultural background, leading to numerous adaptations and performances worldwide. By incorporating different musical elements and performance styles from both Eastern and Western traditions in their musical theatre learning and performances, university teachers and students are deepening their musical theatre art practice in a harmonious way, enhancing the stage effects of musical theatre, and making it more accessible and beloved by more people.

(5) Developing musical theater artistic practice with vocal content

Every type of music has its own unique way of singing, and each singing style has its own characteristics and methods. That's why in university music teaching, vocal skills are crucial and fundamental. The focus should be on basic pitch singing, continually improving the fundamental vocal teaching content, so students can have a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of pitch. Effective vocal skill training can help students improve their singing abilities. During specific training, teachers should guide students to use their breath correctly, showing them how crucial it is to adjust their breath properly in vocal performance. It's not just about making sound with the voice; it's about forming a circle with breath as the pivot, letting the

breath sink and mastering it accurately. Pay special attention to adjusting the breath, as only then can the vocal cords vibrate fully, ensuring the flexibility of students' voices and improving their singing level. For example, in the teaching of the musical "Life Like Flowers", teachers should further enrich the content of the musical, strengthen the cultivation of students' learning skills, and use the musical course to guide students in singing. For a particular singing section, when the female lead pleads with her lover, inserting a song, the teacher can use stage dubbing to deeply express the deep love of the female protagonist for her beloved and various emotions towards reality. Additionally, teachers can provide effective training in singing technique based on bel canto teaching, achieving a beautiful tone, clear diction, and rounded tone quality, enhancing the expressiveness and artistic charm of musical theater.

6. Conclusions

Under the guidance of relevant spirits, innovation, reform, and development in art education at universities have raised the bar and set higher demands. Universities are crucial hubs for driving innovation and reform in art education. With a mission to carry forward art education, university art troupes should maintain their youthful vigor, making significant contributions to the flourishing of literature and art. The practice of musical theater is a powerful tool for talent cultivation within university art troupes. Engaging in artistic practice alongside music education sets apart a distinctive comprehensive quality training approach. Through continuous exploration, the level of musical theater education at universities can be further elevated. The multiple values of university musical theater practice not only have been fully demonstrated currently but also offer endless possibilities for the future. We can anticipate that as musical theater art deepens and develops in university education, students will experience more comprehensive growth, achieving breakthroughs not only in the realm of art but also fostering stronger creativity and team collaboration spirit, contributing more powerfully to the progress of society and cultural endeavors.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

References

- [1] Wei, L.J, Wang Chunyan. Research on sustainable development operation mode of college students' art troupes. *Cultural Industry*, 2020, 23, 121-124.
- [2] Li, Y.W. The practical exploration of musicals in College Music Teaching. *Home of Little Drama*, 2023, 26, 60-62.
- [3] Huang, W.T.; Zhang, Y.L. Analysis on the characteristics and functions of musical Costume Plastic art. *Shandong Textile Economy*, 2023, 08, 23-26.
- [4] Zhu, L. The Development shackles and Breakthrough of Chinese original musicals. *Journal of Hubei Second Normal University*, 2023, 06, 25-30.

- [5] Guo, Y. Localization of Musical Teaching in China. *Journal of Education Science*, Hunan Normal University, 2014, 01.
- [6] Dong, D. Discussion on the practice of musicals in vocal music Teaching. *Drama Home*, 2018, 28, 199.



© 2024 by the author(s); licensee International Technology and Science Publications (ITS), this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)