

# The Broadway Musical in the 1970s: The History of the Broadway Musical



When we think of the 1970s, we often think of a decade filled with disco music, bell-bottom pants, and political unrest. However, it was also a remarkable era for the Broadway musical, with groundbreaking productions that left a lasting impact on the theater industry. In this article, we will explore the history of the Broadway musical in the 1970s and the influential shows that shaped this decade of theatrical excellence.

## A Shining Decade for Musicals

The 1970s marked a significant shift in the world of Broadway musicals. This decade saw the rise of concept-driven and socially relevant productions that challenged traditional storytelling. It was a time when creativity thrived, and new musical forms emerged, bringing in a fresh wave of audiences.



### One More Kiss: The Broadway Musical in the 1970s (The History of the Broadway Musical Book

6) by Ethan Mordden (Kindle Edition)

★★★★☆ 4.5 out of 5

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One of the defining shows of the 1970s was "A Chorus Line." With music by Marvin Hamlisch and lyrics by Edward Kleban, this musical brought the backstage world of aspiring Broadway dancers to the forefront. It explored personal stories and vulnerabilities, captivating audiences and critics alike. Its iconic songs like "What I Did for Love" and powerful dance sequences set the stage for future musicals.

## Broadway Gives Voice to Social Change

The 1970s was a time of social and political turmoil, and Broadway musicals were not immune to reflecting these changes. Productions like "Hair" and "Jesus Christ

"Superstar" tackled topics such as civil rights, anti-war sentiments, and religious exploration.

"Hair," which made its Broadway debut in 1968 but continued running through the 1970s, became a symbol of counterculture and the hippie movement. Its rock-inspired score and controversial scenes, such as onstage nudity, challenged societal norms. "Jesus Christ Superstar," on the other hand, presented a rock opera interpretation of the last days of Jesus Christ, exploring religious themes and social justice.

## **Powerhouse Productions and Legendary Performers**

The 1970s also witnessed the rise of powerhouse productions and unforgettable performances. "Chicago," with music by John Kander and lyrics by Fred Ebb, premiered in 1975 and introduced the world to the dark side of fame and corruption. It became a long-running success and was later revived multiple times, solidifying its place in Broadway history.

Furthermore, the legendary performer Chita Rivera took the stage as Velma Kelly in "Chicago," showcasing her immense talent and becoming an icon of the era. Her electrifying performances and show-stopping numbers garnered her critical acclaim and adoration from audiences everywhere.

## **Revitalizing the Musical Genre**

The 1970s revitalized the musical genre by pushing boundaries and introducing new styles. Stephen Sondheim's "Company" (1970) showcased a non-linear narrative and unconventional structure, challenging traditional expectations of musical storytelling. Another notable production, "A Little Night Music" (1973), featured a waltz-inspired score and explored the complexities of love and relationships.

These innovative shows paved the way for future musicals, inspiring a new generation of performers, writers, and directors. The 1970s marked a pivotal moment in Broadway history, where traditional norms were shattered, and experimentation thrived.

## **The Legacy of the Broadway Musical in the 1970s**

Many of the Broadway musicals from the 1970s continue to captivate audiences today, either through revivals or their lasting influence on the industry. Their impact transcends time, reminding us of the power of theater to both entertain and provoke thought.

As we look back at the 1970s, we recognize it as a period of immense creativity and artistic expression. The Broadway musicals of this decade forever changed the landscape of theater, leaving an indelible mark on audiences and inspiring future generations.





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Ethan Mordden's new entry in his history of the Broadway musical looks at an era that brought us not only the gritty reality of "A Chorus Line" and the brilliantly bittersweet works of Stephen Sondheim, but also the nostalgic crowd-pleasers "No, No, Nanette" and "Annie." It was a time when Broadway both looked to its past, but also to its future and allowed reality to enter. Mordden writes of the last time we ever saw true greatness on the stage of the Broadway musical.

"[A] treasure trove for fans of the musical theatre." - Richard Ouzonian, Toronto Star



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